

[The Psychedelic Library Homepage](#)

[Books Menu Page](#)

High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1. An Overview of Marijuana](#)

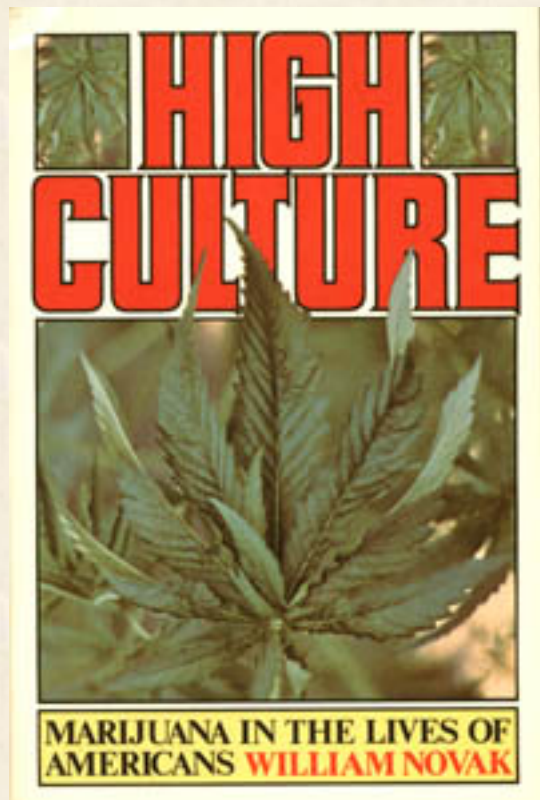
[2. The First Time](#)

[3. Marijuana Activities I: Food and Music](#)

[4. Marijuana Activities II](#)

[5. Sex and Intimacy](#)

[6. The Social Drug](#)



**7. "I Get Paid for Paranoia"
A Self-Portrait of a Marijuana
Dealer**

8. Marijuana and the Mind

**9. The Personal Drug: Heart, Body,
and Soul**

**10. Looking Back: When Grass Was
Greener**

11. Varieties of Marijuana

12. Dangers and Problems, Real and Alleged

13. Using Marijuana Well—and Using It Badly

14. Looking Ahead: Smoders Speculate on the Future

Appendix I: Letters from Smokers (and Nonsmokers)

Appendix II: Studies on the Effects of Marijuana in Users

Annotated Bibliography

Selected Bibliography

High Culture

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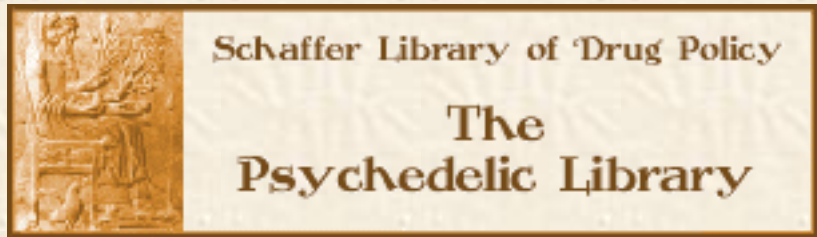
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Introduction

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[Books Menu Page](#)

High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

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Introduction

Jacob's Ladder

This is a book about the personal uses of marijuana, and so I will begin personally. My first exposure to marijuana occurred while I was in college, where some of my friends were using it and making positive claims on its behalf. At first I resisted any association with drugs, believing, along with most of the population, that people who used drugs were undoubtedly troubled, unhappy, and alienated.

And yet, my friends who smoked marijuana did not fit into any of the stereotypes that had been created by a public anxious about the new "drug problem." They were not dropouts, or hippies, or amotivated, or unhappy. They did not progress from marijuana to "harder" drugs. Nor did they appear to be using marijuana to avoid dealing with reality or to escape.

I grew increasingly curious about marijuana, and following several years of equivocation, I finally tried it in 1969, at the age of twenty-one. I was far too nervous to get high that first time, but I do recall the feeling of relief that came from knowing that I had finally, inevitably, lost my marijuana virginity and was thus joining that half of the world Who Knew What It Was Like, even if in actual fact I did not.

In time, though, I would find out. A decade later, I was still curious about marijuana. Having learned what it was like for me, I now wanted to find out what it was like for other people. This book was my way of finding out.

For me, marijuana has been an intellectual stimulant, serving as a useful tool in breaking down certain conceptual boundaries and categories that, I now see, kept out more

light than they let in. Marijuana also presented a different version of reality than the one I was used to. Sometimes, when I have been high, I have felt like a visitor to another land, a land both familiar and new at the same time, only inches and moments away from the land I normally inhabit but also remote—and uncharted on any map I have consulted.

During these visits, I have often wanted to take notes, to be sent back as postcards to myself in the places I have temporarily left behind. Sometimes the message on the postcard is a simple greeting, or a knowing smile. At other times it is a feeling or an insight I want to preserve and remember, or perhaps a fresh way of seeing a familiar object, idea or person. Occasionally, the postcard might describe an experience or an encounter lived deeply and intensely. And sometimes, the message is a brief one saying, "Hey, when you get back to the world you normally occupy, try to recall some of what you saw and felt and understood while you were here."

As marijuana users are well aware, remembering and retaining the marijuana experience after it is over can sometimes be difficult, because the marijuana high carries with it a built-in erasure factor commonly known as "interference with short-term memory." But preserving at least some of the experience is important, because for many smokers the real and lasting pleasure of being high is to read those postcards on another day, to integrate into one's "straight" life the texture and illumination of a different reality, and ultimately, to bring the two worlds a little closer. That they are often only slightly and subtly different from each other merely serves to make the challenge of integrating them that much more difficult.

For me, the existence of these two worlds and the need to bridge the gap between them suggest the Biblical motif of Jacob's ladder. In chapter 28 of Genesis, we are told that Jacob is traveling, and he stops for the night at a place he will name Beth-El. There, he falls asleep and has the famous dream:

*Here, a ladder set up on the earth,
its head reaching to heaven,
and here, angels of God
going up and down upon it.* [1]

Jacob's ladder represents in visual terms the intention of this book: to establish a link, a bridge, perhaps even a ladder, but at least a means of access and communication between two different states of consciousness. I want to describe the "high" world in a way that makes sense in the "straight" one, where most of us spend the bulk of our lives. By drawing upon the experiences of marijuana users, I hope to provide a realistic understanding of what being high is like, in a way that makes sense both to the experienced smoker and to the person who has never tried marijuana. To this end, I shall say no more about my own marijuana use, preferring instead to serve as a guide to the experiences of some three hundred other people. To read their accounts is, I hope, to become comfortable going up and down that ladder which links one state of consciousness to another.

For those who have never tried marijuana, or who have tried it with no apparent result

(a common occurrence), I hope to provide a reasonably complete answer to the question: "What is it like?" For those already familiar with the drug, I have ordered some of its effects and experiences into a cultural and social context. More importantly, this book provides language and expression for various feelings and perceptions that marijuana users know well but may never have been able to put into words. I also hope that users can benefit from this book by learning from each other more successful and satisfying models of marijuana use and by becoming more aware of the experiences—and some of the problems—that their fellow smokers report.

These are some of the elements that struck me as essential for a book about the personal uses of marijuana. I searched for such a book in vain, concluding, finally, that it did not exist. Indeed, I used to think that it *could* not exist; how else could I account for its absence? The idea, after all, was so obvious that somebody must have done it already. But nobody had, so I have attempted to write the sort of book about marijuana that I have long wanted to read.

There are, to be sure, many good books about marijuana, and I have read virtually all of them. But what I read was mostly academic or scientific, dealing with medicine, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, or other fields of knowledge. Those rare selections that were personal tended also to be literary, and usually had an exotic and false ring to them—especially the well-known and elaborate accounts of the nineteenth-century French writers, including Baudelaire and Gautier, who described their experiences with hashish. But these men, it turns out, did not smoke small quantities of hashish—which is made from the same plant as marijuana—as some Americans do; they *ate* hashish, and in large quantities, a combination that can induce florid visions.^[2] In addition, hashish is often more potent, being to marijuana roughly as Scotch is to beer. There is another difference as well; scholars now believe that the accounts of the French hashish writers were influenced by their interest in certain other drugs, notably opium.

In short, then, I could find almost nothing in print that bore much resemblance to what the people I knew were experiencing and describing. When asked, my friends and acquaintances spoke not of dreamlike visions or elaborate fantasies but of simpler, more direct, and more modest experiences. Often, they would describe a new way of looking at something, or an interesting insight, or perhaps a feeling of joy or contentment; marijuana, they seemed to be saying, was certainly interesting, pleasant, and above all *fun*, but it was rarely alien to their normal consciousness. Before I began to write this book, I had no reason to believe that the marijuana experiences of these people were unique; now, after interviewing and corresponding with three hundred marijuana users of various ages, backgrounds, and social classes, I know that they were not.

Marijuana in the 1980s

Nobody knows with any certainty how many Americans use marijuana regularly. Some current estimates suggest that as many as fifty million people have tried it, of whom about

half smoke it with some regularity. There are probably between five and ten million people who use marijuana at least two or three times a week, and this is possibly a conservative guess. In 1977, a Gallup Poll^[3] reported that one American in four over the age of eighteen had tried marijuana at least once; *that* figure, the report added, had doubled since 1973. In the years since 1977, it is reasonable to assume that the numbers have once again increased sharply. The consumption of marijuana has grown steadily in each of the past twenty years, both in terms of bulk and in the number of smokers; in all likelihood, the trend will continue well into the 1980s.

The financial implications of all this are staggering. At an average retail price of \$35 an ounce, marijuana sales make up an industry that boasts something like \$10 *billion* a year in sales. And that figure is estimated to be four times larger than it was as recently as 1974, when many observers thought that marijuana use had peaked.

These facts may come as a surprise to those who thought they had witnessed the fading away of the counterculture of the 1960S. Actually, what has happened is that the counterculture is merely no longer *visible*. Many of the styles, values, and modes of behavior that once characterized it have become accepted—albeit in a diffused form—into the mainstream of American life. Like the other aspects of the culture that spawned its widespread use, marijuana has not disappeared either, but rather has grown up and changed its clientele. One need only look at today's movies, television, books, political trends, and public attitudes to be reminded that much of what used to be considered counterculture is now more or less accepted by large segments of the population.

True, some things have changed. The hippies are gone, the students are quiet, the communes have mostly disbanded, and many of the young radicals of a previous decade are now selling insurance or practicing law. But many of the survivors of the sixties continue to smoke marijuana, and their number has been swelled by the coming of age of the seventies generation. While most of the psychedelic trappings associated with marijuana in the 1960S have fallen away, marijuana itself remains, playing a significant and in many cases a prominent role in the personal lives of millions of Americans, a role that has gone largely unexamined.

What this means is that great numbers of marijuana smokers are no longer part of the younger generation. People who were in their twenties when they first smoked marijuana as students in 1968 are now in their thirties, and many of them are ambitious professionals who work in banks, schools, offices, publishing houses, advertising agencies, law firms, hospitals, and in politics—including the White House. As these people have grown older, their reasons for using marijuana have changed, as have their patterns of use. Clearly, it is no longer helpful to attribute the popularity of marijuana to the alienation of the young, or to American foreign policy, or to political protest movements. To learn the details of America's love affair with marijuana, it is necessary to turn to the only people who have known them all along: the smokers themselves.

Not surprisingly, the dramatic increase in the consumption of marijuana during the 1970s has had an effect on the public debate about marijuana, which is now far less heated than it once was. First of all, marijuana smokers themselves now have access to levels of power and public opinion that were hitherto unavailable to them. In addition, nonusers of

marijuana are far more likely than before to have direct knowledge of the drug and its users. As a result, as more people smoke marijuana without noticeable bad effects, fewer people are worried about its alleged dangers.

The issue, in short, has become dramatically less polarized, almost as though the advocates and opponents of marijuana had struck a bargain: "We'll stop making our optimistic and inflated claims about how marijuana is really good for you if you'll stop exaggerating its potential hazards and dangers." While no such negotiating actually took place, both sides in the debate have significantly relaxed their respective positions.

The best indication of this moderation can be seen in the changing marijuana laws. As this book goes to press, the possession of marijuana has been changed from a criminal to a civil offense in eleven states. In 1973, Oregon became the first state to eliminate criminal arrest and jail penalties for the possession of small amounts of marijuana, and to substitute a citation-enforced civil fine, roughly equal in seriousness to a parking ticket. (Subsequent studies in Oregon have revealed that the residents of that state now smoke about the same amount of marijuana as they did before the new law.) Ten other states have enacted similar reforms: Alaska, Maine, Colorado, California, Ohio, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, and Nebraska. In addition, President Carter has called for the federal decriminalization of marijuana.

Political change, of course, is directly affected by personal attitudes. Ten years ago, most people who used marijuana did not tell their parents about it; these days, marijuana users are as likely to be concerned about what to tell their *children*. In the 1960s, those parents who discovered or were told that their sons and daughters were using marijuana were often outraged or horrified. Today, many parents are aware that their children use the drug, and while they may not approve of it and may have little idea as to how often their children indulge, neither do they seem to be expending much energy worrying about it. They have simply learned to live with marijuana, as they have learned to live with premarital sex, rock music, and other phenomena of the 1960s that have become part of mainstream culture.

The Purpose of This Book

This book focuses on the individual user and attempts to answer certain basic questions. First, what happens, exactly, when a person smokes marijuana? How does that person feel? What does he or she experience? And second, how do marijuana users really *use* marijuana? When and where and why and how often do they smoke? What do they get out of it? Does marijuana help—or hinder—them personally, socially, mentally, creatively, or in other ways? Do marijuana users experience any special problems or conflicts? Does marijuana seem especially appropriate in certain situations and activities, and inappropriate in others? What do smokers think about marijuana and their own use of it, and how does it fit in with the rest of their lives? And finally, now that marijuana is being increasingly accepted as a legitimate recreational activity, where might the new lines be

drawn to separate use from abuse, and what might it mean to use marijuana well—or badly?

These are not new questions. Some have been asked before, but most often in terms of laboratory calculations or technologically measured responses, or, at best, through questionnaires. Seldom have they been asked in subjective and personal terms, in open-ended conversations with marijuana smokers in their own homes. Even less often have marijuana smokers had the opportunity to answer these questions in their own words, rather than in the technical terms of the social scientist, or the specialized language of computers or statistics.

This does not mean, of course, that social scientists, physicians, and other researchers and experts have nothing important to tell us about marijuana—merely that they can't tell us everything. Unfortunately, the history of marijuana research includes numerous attempts to make the facts conform to certain prejudices on the part of the researchers, although in some cases, the researchers have changed their minds in the face of the evidence, in other cases, the studies have been discredited. Recently however, marijuana research has been conducted on a more impartial plane, and some social scientists, including Erich Goode, a sociologist, and Charles Tart, a psychologist, have conducted important research by communicating directly with marijuana users themselves.^[4]

Despite some progress in recent years, the degree of ignorance about marijuana (and other illicit drugs) on the part of the nonusing public remains formidable. It is comparable, perhaps, to what most Soviet citizens might understand about the nature of a free and democratic society, or to what Americans might know about alcohol if they had never taken a drink, been to a bar, or seen an advertisement for beer or liquor.

There are various reasons for this ignorance. For many people, marijuana is an unknown quantity, and they fear it. In addition marijuana's identification with different fringe and minority groups during the twentieth century has made it appear less than respectable. The fear and ignorance about marijuana that reached its zenith in the late 1930s, in response to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics's carefully orchestrated campaign of hysteria, has not entirely abated. Most important, the marijuana experience is not easy to comprehend for many Americans, representing as it does a break from the reality with which most people are familiar. It differs, too, from more familiar American alternatives to conventional reality such as dreams, insanity, and alcohol intoxication, to which smoking marijuana *is* sometimes naturally, though wrongly, compared.

Marijuana *is* different: its users can almost always function normally under its influence and can, if they wish, conceal the fact that they have used it. As one observer of the subject has put it, the only way to know for sure whether somebody is high on marijuana is if he tells you—and perhaps not even then.

How This Book Was Written

The bulk of this book is based upon lengthy interviews I had with marijuana users during

1978 primarily in Boston, and also in New York and California. In each interview, I first asked some general questions, and then encouraged the person I was speaking with to lead the discussion into areas of his or her personal interest. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, and I sent a copy of the transcript to the people I interviewed, inviting them to elaborate on or to clarify anything they had said, or to add anything they had thought of in the aftermath of the interview.

Most of the interviews lasted close to three hours, yielding an average of some twenty pages of transcript. The majority of those I spoke with chose to get high during the interview, which usually facilitated their recollection of previous high experiences. "It's like mountain climbing," one smoker told me. "When you're standing on a peak, you get a clear and unobstructed view of those peaks you've already climbed." Being high also served to encourage some of the people I met with to be more relaxed and more personal during our conversation. In all, I spoke with a hundred users.

Finding them was easy. I inquired among those smokers I knew, who in turn led me to others. I was in the especially fortunate position of having a long list of people who were not only willing but actually eager to speak with me; a number of users, upon hearing of my book through reports in newspapers, radio, and television, contacted me and requested interviews. Many told me that they had never before had the opportunity to reflect openly and at length about what was an important part of their lives, a source of considerable pleasure and, in a few cases, a source of anxiety and conflict as well.

Each interview provided fresh material; I found less conventional wisdom about marijuana, at least among its users, than I had anticipated. After the first twenty or so interviews, it became clear that the subject was a larger one than I had realized and that my sample would be neither broad enough nor varied enough for what I wanted to accomplish. And so I began work on a second front, soliciting letters and written statements from marijuana smokers in all parts of the country. To do this, I placed classified advertisements in about twenty national, regional, and college publications, saying, more or less in these words, "Author writing a book about the personal uses of marijuana wishes to correspond with people who have ideas, experiences, and anecdotes. Anonymity guaranteed." An ad in *Rolling Stone* was particularly successful, resulting in about fifty letters. Query letters in *High Times* (a monthly magazine for users of recreational drugs) and the *New York Times Book Review* led to another hundred letters. Local radio and television publicity, including a syndicated radio announcement based on an article about my work in the *Village Voice* and broadcast on FM stations in several cities, generated the rest of the letters. In all, I received about three hundred responses, of which approximately two-thirds turned out to be useful. I answered each query with this reply:

The Marijuana Book

The book will be published in 1979 by Alfred A. Knopf, New York. You can help by answering as few questions as possible—in as much detail as you can.

No names will appear in the book, but it would help if you told me your age, profession, sex, and so forth.

Please feel free to duplicate this sheet, and to send it to anybody you know who might respond to it.

THE QUESTIONS:

1. When do you smoke, where, and how often? With whom? Do you smoke mostly under certain circumstances? Are there certain moods or settings that you find particularly suitable—or unsuitable—for using marijuana?
2. How (if at all) has marijuana affected your values or personality? (Please be as specific as possible.)
3. Is marijuana an issue between you and any of your friends? Between you and your parents? You and your children? You and—yourself? If so, can you explain the nature of the problem, and your solution, if any?
4. Have you invented or participated in any special stoned activities, or stoned games?
5. Could you go into detail and explain *how*, exactly, marijuana affects you with regard to any of the following activities: sports, playing music, listening to music, dreaming, sleeping, sex, socializing, thinking, watching television, going to work or school, feeling, introspection—or anything else?
6. How, if at all, does marijuana affect your creativity?
7. Have you had any insights—however trivial or wrong they may now seem (or however wonderful)—while under the influence?
8. Have you ever had an especially bad/good/interesting marijuana experience?
9. Where do you think things are headed with regard to marijuana use in America?
10. Is there any difference, for you, in the effects of different kinds of

marijuana?

11. Are there any myths or misconceptions about marijuana which you would like to see corrected in a book like this?

12. What would it mean to use marijuana "well"—or "badly"?

Thank you very much for your assistance!

Because I encouraged my correspondents to go into detail on particular subjects that interested them, not all of my questions were answered, and I did not receive many responses to any one question. For this reason, and because my sample was arrived at by means that were anything but scientific, I have refrained from making quantifiable judgments except where I was fairly certain that I was correct. Readers interested in such things as the most common effects of marijuana are referred to Appendix II, where I have included conclusions from several other studies.

The people represented in this book are self-selected. They tend to be unusual in the following respects: marijuana is probably more important to them, and they probably use it more often and more consciously, than is true for most smokers. Those users who responded by mail tended to be between the age of fifteen and forty; having grown up in a relatively free climate with regard to marijuana, the younger smokers were less nervous about telling their experiences to a stranger than were the relatively older users. A number of college and graduate students are represented in this book, along with some high school students, mental health workers, teachers, writers, artists, musicians, housewives, office workers, salespeople, mechanics, broadcasters, computer programmers, restaurant workers, drug dealers, journalists, and prisoners.

Among the people not fully represented in this book, in terms of their probable statistical representation among all marijuana smokers, are, most significantly, users under the age of about fifteen. This is really a separate group of smokers, whose use and misuse of marijuana appears to be rather different from that of the larger population. The statements and the generalizations about smokers in these pages do not necessarily apply to this group. Also not fully represented in this book are smokers over fifty, members of minority groups, blue-collar workers, civil servants and politicians, latter-day hippies, and, so far as I am aware, homosexuals. Women and men are represented about equally.

Except for occasional changes in grammar and style for the sake of clarity, quotations from users appear virtually unedited. At the back of the book, I have included in full some of the more interesting and informative letters I received. With both the letters and the interviews, I have omitted or slightly altered any details that might reveal the identity of the person being quoted. In a few cases, where an individual makes several appearances in the book, I have provided a pseudonymous first name for the sake of continuity. Scientists or other experts quoted from either conversations or written work are referred to by their full names.

A Note on Language

With some exceptions for the titles of books and articles, I have used the spelling "marijuana" throughout. I have not distinguished among such terms as "high," "stoned," "wrecked," and so forth, and neither did most of those who communicated with me. A few years ago, there were clear delineations: a smoker might first "catch a buzz," and then get "high." If he or she continued smoking, or if the marijuana were of good quality, the next stage might be "stoned" and then "wrecked," followed by "wasted"—although few smokers want to alter their consciousness to that extent. These days, most users employ these various terms casually and more or less interchangeably, which is how they are used in this book.

Curiously, there is no adequate word in our culture to describe the opposite of being high. Users speak of "coming down" after being high, and of being down, straight, sober, and even normal, but nobody seems very satisfied with these terms, which don't really express what the user means: simply the absence of feeling high.

A "joint" is a marijuana cigarette. A "toke" is a puff; the word is also used as a verb. To "turn on" once meant to smoke marijuana for the first time; now it simply means to get high, which is also known as "partying" by younger smokers. A "roach" is the butt of a joint, universally thought to be the most potent part of the cigarette (although this has never been established for certain); the word is thought to have come from the butt's resemblance to a cockroach. A "lid" is a measurement of marijuana, either an ounce, or slightly less, depending on the year and the city; today, the expression is used more in the West than in the East and appears to be on its way out. A "head," which comes from the epithet "pothead," refers to somebody who smokes marijuana; among many smokers, "head" refers to anybody who smokes more than they do.

Throughout this book, I have used the pronoun "he" as a convenience in referring to smokers of both sexes.

The single most popular expression among marijuana smokers is "oh wow!" In writing this book, I have done my best to avoid using this phrase. Instead, my purpose has been to suggest some of the thoughts and feelings that lie behind "oh wow!" and to investigate and describe some of the many things the words can mean.

Marijuana smokers refer to marijuana in a variety of ways, with "pot," "grass," "smoke," and "dope" being the most common designations. "Herb" and "weed" are popular in some circles. Older names for marijuana include "jive," "goof-butts," "muggles," "gauge," "Mary Jane," "loco-weed," "tea," "reefer," and "boo."^[5] The botanical name of the most common type of marijuana is *Cannabis sativa* L.; more often, it is simply called cannabis.

On the subject of names, a Boston poet had this to say:

I've always been partial to "cannabis" as a name for it; "kif" and "bhang" are

pretentious and pedantic, although they sound wonderful. "Hash" is hash; "grass" and even "marijuana," I find, are two words that folks even at our callow level of hipness shun to use. "Shit" is a word we use mid-Saturday evening at some stranger's apartment in Central Square where we're stopping off on the way to somewhere else. A joint is circulating, and we decide we don't care what we sound like, and the word has to be used with an adjective like "good" or "bad" or, better, "dynamite." If we happen to be near MIT, it might be, "toroid... y'know what I mean?"

Then there's a whole set of poetic synonyms, most of which I've forgotten, like silt, gelt, wacca-wacca, dog, wind, bull, wand, shazam, pussy, wing, volt, dirt, moon, and so on. But mostly: the weed, stuff, and of course, dope. "Dope" has an interesting history: it began as the word parents and teachers used derogatorily to ward off its use by kids; the word caught on sometime in the '60s, at first humorously, as if to try on the bourgeois characterization for size, then in self-satire, then with just a slight waning-to-infinitesimal giddiness, then finally, more routine use, no longer ironic. It's almost all used up as a word, but the more I have the stuff, the more I'm not altogether certain it's a bad designation. But that's still an open question. One way or another, each word we use has its own shape, its own set of resonances, its own social context. I like "cannabis," especially in phrases like "Oh yes, he uses cannabis." A name's a posture.

Notes:

1. Biblical quotation: Genesis 28: 12. From Everett Fox, "In the Beginning: An English Rendition of the Book of Genesis," *Response* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 75. Revised, 1979, by the translator. ([back](#))
2. For a comprehensive consideration of the French hashish writers, see Lester Grinspoon, *Marihuana Reconsidered*, pp. 55-85. ([back](#))
3. Gallup: Marijuana in America (Princeton, N.J.), Report No. 143, June 1977, p. 1 ([back](#))
4. Social scientists: See [Erich Goode, *The Marijuana Smokers*](#), and [Charles Tart, *On Being Stoned*](#). ([back](#))
5. For more on names by which smokers call marijuana, see "R., the Dope Connoisseur," "What Do You Call This Stuff?" *High Times*, March 1979, pp. 18-19. ([back](#))

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

1. An Overview of Marijuana

Suddenly you're through the looking glass. It's your bedroom or living room all right, and everything is exactly the same, but everything is exactly different than it ever was before you were stoned. And suddenly you don't care about your arthritis, or that you have to appear in court the next day because of a speeding ticket, or that you've got a mid-term paper due in two days, or that you've only got one ear.

— A Child's Garden of Grass [\[1\]](#)

General Effects

Only two effects of marijuana on the human body have been established without question: a reddening of the eyes (conjunctival vascular congestion) and a temporary increase in the rate of heartbeat (tachycardia) Marijuana also appears to dry up the mouth and the tear ducts.[\[2\]](#)

Although marijuana is not new to American life, and although its recorded history goes back several thousand years, it was not until 1968 that these basic facts were established. In a study conducted at Boston University, Dr. Norman E. Zinberg of the Harvard Medical School and Andrew Weil, then a medical student at the same institution, conducted a series of pilot experiments in an effort to learn about the effects of marijuana intoxication

on human beings.^[3] What made the experiments notable was that this was the first study of cannabis to be conducted in a double-blind fashion, with neither the subjects nor the administrators of the experiments aware during the study of who was smoking marijuana and who was smoking a well-designed placebo.

Among other findings, the Zinberg and Weil study disproved the commonly held notion that marijuana causes a dilation of the pupils. This "fact" had been so prominently believed by the general public that it was often used by the police as a cause for searching a residence for illicit drugs. Some drugs do cause a dilation of the pupils, but marijuana is not one of them. This basic error is typical of the state of marijuana "research" until the 1960s, before which, apparently, nobody had thought to study the drug scientifically. The misconception about dilated pupils arose in the first place, Zinberg and Weil speculated, because smokers were using marijuana in darkened rooms; that, and not the drug, accounted for the change.

Subsequent studies and surveys have revealed other basic effects of marijuana.^[4] Users commonly report an increased ability to concentrate on whatever it is they are doing or thinking about; for many, marijuana leads to a general increase in the intensity of most aspects of life. Another very common effect is a heightening of sensual excitation: listening to music, viewing a film or work of art, making love, eating—all are commonly reported to be enhanced by marijuana. Often, when a user is high, one of his senses will work cooperatively with another in a process known as synesthesia: for example, a smoker may have the sensation of being able to "see" the music he is listening to. In addition, many users find that abstract ideas and sensations become more concrete, and more visual as well.

Under the influence of marijuana, time appears to pass more slowly, short-term memory seems to be impaired, and smokers often find themselves feeling relaxed, free, creative, and outside the normal restraints of time, space, and, sometimes, social amenities. Users speak of a sense of "well-being" and commonly feel peaceful and content. They tend to feel happy, as well. "When I'm high," says a day-care worker, "my mouth starts to hurt from smiling so much."

The high normally reaches its peak within about half an hour after smoking; after another hour, it often gives way to a slight lethargy or tiredness. Conversation and general awareness, after being stimulated during the first hour, will often fade a little in the second. This process is known as "coming down," and for some smokers it is slightly unpleasant, resulting in a headache or in a "cloudy" or "foggy" mental state. The effects of coming down may be delayed by a second or third round of smoking or by going to sleep. The most common aftereffect is tiredness, which, for a few smokers, extends into a kind of hangover the following day. Although different kinds of marijuana appear to have somewhat different effects, the determining factors reside in the individual rather than in the drug.

Marijuana's most common effects occur in the mind of the user. Ideas may flow more quickly ("like throwing gasoline on a fire," observes a scientist), and the smoker may find himself thinking more imaginatively and perhaps gaining a new perspective on a familiar scene or problem. The new perspective sometimes renders events transcendent; at other

times, it illuminates the mundane; occasionally, the user may have trouble knowing the difference.

There are physical effects as well, and smokers sometimes talk of such responses as a tingling sensation in their limbs, a drop in body temperature, and various other subtle changes. But it is not clear whether these changes are real or merely imagined. As sociologist Howard Becker explains it, "There are all kinds of physical and even psychological events going on in your body all the time. Most of them you've learned to ignore, like momentary tics of a muscle, or quivers, or other things of that kind. Ordinarily, you feel it happening and you say, 'Oh, *that*.' When you're a child, you tell your mother and she tells you not to worry about it. And the next time it happens, you ignore it. On marijuana, however, you might not ignore it, especially if you're nervous about using the drug. But if you just sit and pay serious attention to your body for a few minutes, whether or not you're stoned, you'll discover all sorts of things going on, things you would normally ignore, things which are capable of being interpreted if you're so inclined."

Many smokers speak of an increased awareness of their bodies in positive terms. "I can almost feel the blood rushing through my veins," says one man, "and the boom boom boom of my heart."

How Marijuana Works

The agent in marijuana that is thought to be responsible for most of the drug's effects is a psychoactive chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly known as THC. Generally speaking, THC is found in greater quantities in marijuana plants grown in tropical climates, although the determining factor is not environment but heredity. While potency is generally measured in terms of the THC content, marijuana also contains dozens of related chemicals known as cannabinoids, which are unique to the cannabis plant. Research on the effects of these other chemicals is still in the early stages.^[5]

Much of the THC in the marijuana plant is concentrated in the sticky resin exuded from its flowering tops when it reaches maturity. These flower tops, together with the upper leaves of the plant, are dried, crushed, and shipped from their country of origin to marijuana smokers in the United States and elsewhere.

(Hashish is generally made from the resin alone, although contrary to popular belief, it is not a standard substance; like stew, hashish is made differently in different societies. According to folklore, hashish used to be made by having laborers run naked through fields of cannabis. The resin that stuck to their bodies was scraped off with a special blunt knife, and was then treated and dried and pressed into hashish.)^[6]

Whether or not a person will feel high after smoking marijuana depends on a number of factors. An obvious consideration is the quality of the marijuana that is being smoked, which is generally measured in terms of potency, or THC content. Quantity is important

too, but only up to a point. Most smokers agree that while there is a significant difference between a single toké and smoking an entire joint, there is little difference between, say, two joints and three other than the increased likelihood of fatigue and headache. There is, apparently, a law of diminishing returns after the first joint.

In addition to the quality and quantity of the marijuana that is smoked, the nature and extent of the high will also depend on such factors as the freshness of the marijuana, the origin of the plant, and which part of the plant is being smoked. However, without the use of a laboratory or of rather technical machinery, there is no way for the smoker to know for certain the strength of a particular sample before smoking it. Indeed, it is not always easy for the smoker to assess the potency of the marijuana even *after* smoking it, but that is another discussion (see chapter 11) Until legalization occurs, there can be no equivalent other than hearsay and an educated guess as to the tar levels indicated on a package of cigarettes or, perhaps more accurately, to the proof markings on a bottle of wine or whiskey.

Until a few years ago, drug researchers believed that most of the effects of marijuana were determined by the drug itself. But the more marijuana is studied, the more it appears that the marijuana experience depends on a host of other factors. For the sake of convenience, these are frequently grouped together by researchers under the rather formal phrase "set and setting." "Set" has to do with a series of factors relating to the smoker, including his personality, history, mood at the time of smoking, life-style, outlook on life, past drug experiences, and especially his expectations of the drug's probable effects at the time of its use.

"Setting," on the other hand, has to do with factors relating to the smoker's external environment, as described in physical, social, and even cultural terms. In his study of marijuana smokers, psychologist Charles Tart described set and setting in this way: "The particular effects of a drug are primarily a function of a *particular* person taking a *particular* drug in a *particular* way under *particular* conditions at a *particular* time." [7]

Although most researchers at least pay lip service to the importance of set and setting, they often describe the effects of marijuana as though they were the same for everybody. Even smokers are often convinced that other smokers experience the same results they do. But the facts indicate otherwise. It makes little sense to discuss the effects of marijuana *in general*, because people do not smoke marijuana in general. Marijuana smokers are individuals who differ from each other in many ways and who use the drug with different degrees of frequency, at different times, and for different reasons.

Just as the bored housewife who drinks compulsively at home in the afternoons has little in common with the priest who sips wine at communion, other than that they are both consuming an alcoholic beverage, so, too, marijuana smokers are a diverse group who use the drug in a variety of ways. There are smokers who use marijuana only for special occasions, others who smoke on weekends, and still others who use it habitually, like cigarettes. Some people smoke it for fun, or to stimulate thinking, or for sex, or for relaxing; others smoke because they hope to be stimulated verbally, sensually, emotionally or creatively. Still others use marijuana as a medicine or a sleeping aid, or to work or to escape from work. Invariably, these differences have little to do with the drug,

and everything to do with its users.

The point seems simple enough, but it needs reinforcement; almost everything that most people have been taught about drugs is negated by the idea of set and setting. An analogy from religion may be helpful here. The Buddhist or Hindu mystic who has a religious vision is unlikely to witness an appearance by Elijah or Jesus; such a possibility lies outside his set and setting. Or, in the words of Thomas De Quincey, the English writer who described the effects of opium to an eager public, "if a man whose 'talk is of oxen' should become an opium eater, the probability is, that (if he is not too dull to dream at all)—he will dream about oxen."

That is an example of set. Setting refers to a complex of variables outside the individual using the drug. In our own time, a particularly important aspect of setting is the attitudes of our society toward various illicit drugs. For example, in the 1960S American smokers commonly described feelings of "paranoia," but these feelings have been declining steadily over the past few years. In some other cultures, where marijuana is more generally accepted, they do not occur at all. Similarly, volunteers in experiments who are asked to smoke marijuana in sterile laboratories under rigorously controlled conditions of neutrality do not normally have the same experiences as they do smoking at home with their friends. The point would seem obvious, but it is routinely overlooked by drug researchers.

Being High

"Our normal waking consciousness," wrote William James,

is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness....[\[8\]](#)

While William James was interested in drugs, he was not thinking of marijuana when he wrote these words. Still, his observation sounds familiar to contemporary marijuana users, for whom the drug's effects represent what is commonly referred to as an altered state of consciousness.

As marijuana smokers are well aware, contemporary Western society operates under a common and convenient myth that holds that there is only one real and operative form of consciousness, variously known as the ego state, rationality, or logic. This, we are told in many ways, is what is known as "reality," while other forms, other states of consciousness, be they dreams, physical sensations, drug-induced states, hypnosis, precognition, or intuition, have been—and for the most part still are—considered to be

distortions and aberrations.

Many marijuana users find it difficult to adhere to these beliefs of what constitutes reality. Indeed, for some, marijuana has served as a teacher whose principal lesson has been that life holds multiple forms of reality. "Marijuana has helped me to see the phenomenal power of *plural*" is how one man puts it, continuing: "There is more than one way to look at something, and marijuana has made me aware that perception and consciousness can come in more than one kind of package." A computer programmer speaks of "getting into another realm, and, when that isn't possible, at least accepting that there *is* another realm."

It is only in recent years that social scientists and others have begun to pay serious attention to altered states of consciousness, which include such diverse phenomena as parapsychological manifestations, meditation, and prayer. Of those who have investigated states of consciousness resulting from marijuana and other drugs, Andrew Weil has made an especially significant contribution. After completing work on the 1968 marijuana study in Boston, Weil went on to write a book about states of consciousness, with and without drugs. *The Natural Mind* was published in 1972, and it is something of a classic among marijuana users, being a lively and imaginative theoretical treatment of the marijuana experience.^[9]

Weil believes that all people are high all of the time on some level, and that the point of using drugs is not so much *getting* high as *connecting* with a high that is already there. And so for most users, Weil writes, smoking marijuana becomes an opportunity, and sometimes an excuse, to experience a mode of consciousness that is actually available to everyone all the time without drugs, even though most people do not know how to get there in other ways. Drugs, Weil insists, do not *contain* highs; highs are latent in the human nervous system, waiting to be triggered or released by various mechanisms. This is a message that marijuana users hear all the time from opponents of drug use, but coming from Andrew Weil, it carries more credibility and seems far less of a moral prejudice.

In one way or another, many of the people I interviewed for this book made a similar point: "I don't think marijuana really adds anything that isn't there in the first place," I was told repeatedly. "It just enhances and brings out what's inside of you." Again and again, smokers described variations on this basic theme, not casually but thoughtfully, and often after a decade or more of smoking marijuana. Although these various articulations of the same idea mean that it has become part of the conventional wisdom about marijuana, it is interesting that each person came to this realization individually, and nobody seemed aware that many other marijuana users had come to believe the same thing.

Objectivity, or Double Consciousness

One of the least understood aspects of marijuana intoxication on the part of the nonusing public is the process of "double consciousness," whereby the smoker, despite being

affected by the high, is nonetheless able to reflect upon it with almost complete objectivity while it is taking place, and is able, if the need arises, to "come down" from the high almost at will. "Every time I get stoned," says an Oregon woman, "I have the feeling that I'm watching myself" Her daughter describes a similar feeling:

My body's there, but my mind is up higher, watching me. Once I got high in school, and we were playing volleyball. I was watching the ball going back and forth, and I realized how stupid the whole thing must have looked. Here we were, a bunch of teenagers lunging out to hit a ball over a net, for no real reason. It looked so funny that I started laughing in the middle of the game.

Other smokers refer to this phenomenon as "detachment," or "disassociation." For a Chicago man, double consciousness feels like being in a bubble, where he is part of what is going on but also removed from it. Smokers who experience this phenomenon—and it is very common—do not regard it as a detriment to their enjoyment of the high. On the contrary; for most users it actually increases the pleasure. Lenny, a New England businessman, explains that the sense of being grounded provides "something concrete to stand on while the rest of me can drift off." He elaborates:

Because marijuana is a stimulant, you're aware that you're stoned. You're aware that you're not functioning or perceiving things entirely normally. But your judgment remains more or less the same, so you can usually tell how stoned you are. With a depressant, like alcohol, your judgment is affected, so you're not always aware that you're not aware. That's a crucial difference: on marijuana, you know that something has changed; on alcohol, you might not even realize it.

The sensation of double consciousness is so common a part of the marijuana experience that many smokers are often not even aware of it. An interesting exception is this Atlanta secretary, who feels it to an unusual degree:

When I'm very stoned, I find myself switching constantly between two or more frames of mind. In both of them I am aware of being stoned, but they differ in their effects.

One frame of mind, which I call A, allows me to really get into being stoned. I have insights and revelations, I feel good, let my imagination run free, and generally have a good time. In A, reality is secondary and I rely on instinct to deal with real situations.

In B, the other frame of mind, I deal more directly with reality, and am more aware of the world around me. I can get into a conversation or a piece of music, or if I'm driving, I can concentrate on that.

The neat thing about all of this is the way I can switch from one frame of mind to the other. It can happen, initially, as often as every few seconds, and once I figure out what triggers the switch, I can do the switching *at will*. For example, it might have something to do with whether my eyes are open or shut. Sometimes just changing the direction of my gaze can cause the jump from A to B or back again, or it could be something as simple as changing positions in my chair.

And if I have started a nice fantasy in A, I can switch to B temporarily, and then jump right back to A and pick it up right where I left off.

Related to double consciousness is the ability of most smokers to "come down" or "turn off" the marijuana high when it becomes inappropriate or interfering. Typically, this occurs when the user is pleasantly stoned at home in the evening. The phone rings with an urgent business matter, or bad news, or somebody the person doesn't care to speak with while stoned. Most experienced smokers can handle this situation easily, although this usually involves some kind of sacrifice or payment, a using up of part of the energy of the high, in order to deal properly with the problem or person at hand. Novice smokers routinely find themselves undergoing a kind of on-the-spot training, in which they must suddenly cope with a minor emergency when they are stoned. Usually, to their surprise, they function perfectly well, and this in turn provides reassurance and confidence for the future. Often, there is a sense of mastery and pride that the user feels after meeting such a challenge, and a sense of control that contributes to the enjoyment.

Why People Smoke

People use marijuana for a variety of reasons. The most famous, peer pressure, is indeed one of them, but it is actually far down on the list, and is much less prominent a reason than the public apparently believes. *The most important reason that people try marijuana is out of curiosity; they stay with it if the experience is fun or enjoyable or stimulating.*

Our society finds it profoundly difficult to accept the notion that some people use marijuana and other nonmedical drugs primarily because they lead to experiences that are fun, or meaningful, or both. Built upon formidable Puritan roots, American culture retains the lingering legacy of, in Mencken's famous phrase, "the haunting fear that someone somewhere may be happy." That a rational and responsible person might deliberately perform an act that may not be socially useful or in any way related to the work ethic is a difficult notion—unless, of course, that person *needs* to use drugs. And so, in each decade of the twentieth century, society has invented various reasons to explain the increased use of alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs, including Prohibition, the end of Prohibition, economic depression, war, social tensions, political alienation, conformity, nonconformity, and most recently, the youthful rebellion and the "me decade." By now it

should be clear that while such "reasons" come and go with the years, the use of drugs continues to escalate without regard to the explanations. [10]

In the 1960s, social generalizations about drug use did make some sense. In that era, marijuana smoking was something more than a personal decision; it constituted an act of belonging to a specific subculture or community, with its own norms and values. These days, however, marijuana smokers belong to the same society as everybody else; one result of this change is that even those smokers who appear to use the drug casually have often given serious thought to their reasons for smoking. For some, this reflection may be due to their discomfort in performing an illegal act; for those who find themselves sharing most of society's values and norms, marijuana smoking constitutes an act of defiance they feel they must explain, if only to themselves.

When marijuana users talk about what they find attractive in marijuana, they often mention its effect of allowing the mind to wander almost effortlessly, visiting new places and returning to familiar ones, and focusing in on issues and objects that often lie beyond the normal range of concerns. The focus may be on the secrets of the universe, or a sudden preoccupation with the colors or the pattern of the living room rug; marijuana generally does not respect the operative boundaries that separate the ridiculous from the sublime. When one's normal range of concerns becomes fixed on depressing, trivial or unproductive topics, marijuana may help the user get unstuck, as this research scientist explains:

I smoke pot because I enjoy the idea that one minute my mind and body are tired, confused and depressed, and the next minute it doesn't matter. The high has built up unknowingly while I've been smoking, and the doors of my mind have been opened. My problems and frustrations don't go floating away, but rather, they are no longer important for a while. I can still conjure them up if I want there are, after all, still bills to pay, doctors to visit, relatives to deal with. But where does such worrying get you?

Often, marijuana allows its users to shift their minds away from their own problems and to focus instead on the world immediately around them. And that world, the smokers report, is suddenly more interesting, more alive, more rich with details and possibilities. A retired professor mentions that he smokes whenever he wants to enjoy what he is doing even more. "Life is beautiful," he says, "why not make it transcendent?" Many smokers find that when they are stoned, they appreciate ordinary things more deeply and become more intensely involved in routine experiences.

This is in sharp contradiction to the popular view that smokers use marijuana to "escape" or to avoid coping with "reality." Indeed, both of these uses are possible and, particularly in the case of younger smokers, not uncommon. But most adult smokers find it difficult to use marijuana as an escape, because it simply doesn't work well in that capacity. As a law student put it, "If I smoke to forget some important problem, I'll usually end up thinking about it all the harder. Very often, in fact, I'll be able to solve it, or at least

to understand why I have it."

Some smokers argue, with respect to those who do use marijuana to escape, that it is unfair that such people are judged more harshly than their friends and colleagues who escape in other ways, through television, for example, or music, movies, friends, sleeping, work, or a dozen other routes. Every recreational activity has the potential of being used both well and poorly, and marijuana is no exception. As one smoker puts it, "If something you do for pleasure gets in the way of your life, then it's escape. Otherwise, it's play."

Besides, argue some smokers, a certain amount of escape is both necessary and desirable. A Detroit family described the role played by marijuana in the recuperation of their daughter, a high school student who had been bedridden for months by back surgery. During this period, she used marijuana daily to cope with the pain and the boredom. She regards her own use as escape, but defends it as being essential to her mental health and happiness during an otherwise miserable winter.

But for most smokers, escape is simply not a real issue. On the contrary; for many, marijuana leads to a greater sense of involvement that may, paradoxically, be experienced in terms of detachment or separation. In such cases, marijuana may help the user isolate a particular problem, task, or experience, acting as a kind of chemical coloring agent that shows component parts in relief from the whole that surrounds them. A man who works for an insurance company describes how this process works for him:

Smoking marijuana helps me see my life as a continuous whole. It allows me to step back from my daily concerns and see the direction in which I am headed. If I then feel I should make adjustments, marijuana helps me decide how to proceed. By removing myself temporarily from my daily concerns, I can see how certain little things—an argument I may have had, for example—are just not as important as I had once thought. Not only that, but it also makes me feel that the only way to get past such a problem is by constructive action, rather than mournful brooding.

Claire, a radio announcer who studied philosophy in college, makes a similar point about the relationship between detachment and involvement:

Plato believed that the true philosopher had to step back from the everyday world—the Agora, the marketplace, he called it; there, men are too busy with the mundane details of life: buying and selling, eating and sleeping, taking care of business. To find truth and beauty, Plato said, a man has to remove himself from the business of the everyday world.

For me, marijuana serves such a function. It is a way of stepping out of the routine, and gaining a fresh perspective. It allows me to take the time to simply enjoy and appreciate what is going on, to see beauty in everyday things that I would otherwise never notice.

How Smokers Know They Are High

For some people, the change from "straight" to stoned comes gradually, and there is no distinct point where one sensibility yields to another. Other smokers find that marijuana hits them all at once: "Five brains open up in my head." [11]

An Ohio woman notices that every time she smokes marijuana from a batch with which she is unfamiliar, she experiences a period of waiting and wondering, not knowing what exactly is going to happen, or even whether she is going to feel stoned. Smokers who have been high hundreds of times sometimes have a similar experience. David, a journalist for a Jewish magazine, describes smoking as involving a "leap of faith" and compares the process to that of climbing a ladder whose top step is missing. "You have to take a bit of a jump," he explains, "and if you don't make the effort, you won't get high. There's no free ride."

Judy, a psychotherapist, often finds herself concerned that she won't get high after smoking; to compensate, she will have what she calls "an insurance toke." For example, if she has smoked with friends before going out to dinner, she may, upon arriving at the restaurant, remain in the car an extra moment for the insurance toke, to make sure she will remain high through the meal. The insurance toke serves another purpose; generally, the most interesting and energetic parts of the high occur within a few minutes of smoking, and to achieve the best results, some users prefer to smoke smaller quantities of marijuana spread over several hours, rather than a larger amount all at once.

One way that smokers know they are stoned is that they begin to experience a certain distance between themselves and the rest of the world, which they often describe as similar to the relationship between a film or a play and its audience. Some smokers report that they see themselves as the audience; others feel like the actors. "I find myself making dramatic gestures as though somebody's watching me, even though nobody is" is how one woman describes it.

Similarly, many smokers experience the world around them in staged or dramatic terms. One person calls it "the capital letters syndrome," explaining, "When I'm high, the person I'm with is not just standing around the kitchen making cookies, but is instead Standing Around the Kitchen Making Cookies. The actions seem more important, more deliberate, and more meaningful." David makes a similar point, saying that when he is stoned, he notices that his friends become an exaggerated extension of themselves:

It's very different from the effects of alcohol, which seems to change people in a different way. On marijuana, sloppy people get sloppier, tidy people are continually emptying ashtrays, witty people become even more clever, and funny people are a riot. Unfortunately, boring people become excruciatingly boring, although they are often easier to tolerate because I too am stoned, and I'm usually more flexible and less uptight.

My friends become so very much more themselves, almost to the point of

being self-parodies. I think to myself: here is Joel becoming so Joel, Eva being the essential Eva, and Leora as a caricature of herself.

Some smokers feel this way about themselves, as well. Laurence McKinney, a Boston writer and educator, explains why:

There are parts of you—in fact, 95 percent of you—that are like everybody else. Physically, you're almost exactly like everybody else. But your personality is different. How you view things, your likes and dislikes, the various elements which make up who you are, these are different as well. This has to do with the higher cortical centers in your brain. Now here comes marijuana, which is suddenly going to speed up the entire operation, like pouring grease onto a fire. So for about an hour and a half, you are going to be very much yourself. Every person becomes much more themselves. And the things that particularly interest you normally will become fascinating when you're stoned.

There appears to be no standard way in which people experience and identify the moment wherein they know for sure that they are stoned, and not all smokers experience that moment consciously. For some, it may be a physical sensation in the body, or a certain familiar mental process. For a Wisconsin teacher, it is a series of perceptual changes that she describes:

Within a few seconds of taking a toke or two, the show gets on the road. If the marijuana is good, I can tell right away. Little visual scenes, like the arrangement of the salt and pepper shakers on the table, or the linoleum patterns, will start to hint at inner meaning. Across the room, the sparkle of an aluminum pot becomes a sly wink. The radio music from the hall starts to manifest itself with a new clarity, as though the radio and I were the last living things in the world.

When I get up, my motions feel exaggerated, goofy, entrancing. Somebody comes into the room and we get into a conversation. All attention is on the subject at hand. At some point I might mention that I'm stoned; the other person says she hasn't noticed, and I wonder how that could be.

Relating to Marijuana

Almost by definition, committed smokers enjoy a relationship with marijuana. "If I go for a week or two without smoking," says a Philadelphia clergyman, "I feel like I haven't been home." But among smokers there exists a wide range of attitudes toward the drug, depending on such factors as the frequency with which they use it, their age, and the attitudes of the culture around them. There are smokers for whom marijuana is barely a drug at all; they use it habitually and have long ago stopped getting high. At the other end of the spectrum are those who use marijuana as a kind of miracle drug, who ascribe to it an endless string of positive characteristics, sometimes viewing it as a kind of sacrament that must be treated as something special in order for the user to fully enjoy and appreciate its gifts:

Grass gives you time, a very precious gift, to think about what you did today, and what you're going to do tomorrow, and also what you did yesterday, and why. You learn the reasons for the things you do, and it lets you learn quickly, without wasting much time. All dope is good for the experienced user, but you have to know how to use it instead of lose it, or else it's wasted—and so are you. And so is the time you've used up without learning anything.

This approach is similar to the quasi-religious attitude of those smokers who view marijuana in terms of a natural product that has been put on earth specifically for the enjoyment and enlightenment of human beings. A college freshman explains:

Like trees, earth and water, pot is truly a gift from heaven. It makes you happy, confident and patient. It makes me truly enjoy people and enjoy living. If you go up to a complete stranger and ask if they want to get high, chances are they will jump at the opportunity. I came within an inch of going to prison once for possession of marijuana, but I'll never quit getting high. I have never met anyone who regrets that he has started smoking, and I believe that everybody should try it once in his life.

For Judy, this feeling occurs only occasionally, when marijuana appears unexpectedly:

A particularly wonderful thing is to come upon some dope by surprise. Like on a Saturday afternoon: my husband and I have driven around trying to buy furniture, and we're on each other's nerves and fighting. We decide to treat ourselves to Chinese food. It sounds like a great idea, we are both thinking, but it's too bad we don't have any dope.

Then one of us gets the brilliant notion that there may be a roach in the ashtray, and lo and behold, there is! Actually, there are several, but there is only one just big enough to help erase the cares of the day, and allow us to

laugh at them and enhance our dinner.

The "roach in the ashtray" experience occurs infrequently, and it really has to, by definition; it is most authentic and most gratifying if it's a surprise. For many smokers, there is an inverse relationship between the frequency with which they smoke and the extent to which they value marijuana. Carol is a psychiatric nurse in her mid-thirties who smokes only once or twice a month. Her life by no means revolves around marijuana, and yet it is clearly important to her:

Sometimes I have found myself thinking: this particular high tonight is worth the whole cost of this ounce, even if it's fifty dollars. Obviously, this is one item in which I'm getting my money's worth. I really don't flinch anymore if the ounce is fifty dollars. I know I'll keep it a long time and get immeasurable pleasure from it.

Part of a smoker's relationship with marijuana may involve a personal understanding of how it works, of what it means to the smoker. Occasionally, a smoker will explain this in metaphorical terms. Marijuana, says an Oklahoma man, "is truly a weed that turns to a flower in your mind." David uses a different image:

I think there's a lot of mythology about how grass works. If you open a window, for example, and see a lovely view, you surely don't assume that the window *caused* the view. And yet people are always making that mistake about grass. It doesn't give you anything new; it gives you access to new things. The results are the same, but the process is different.

Notes

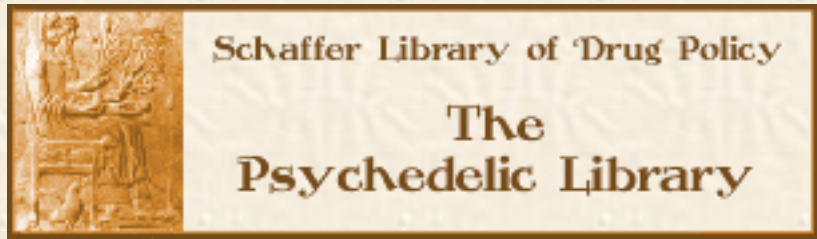
1. *Epigraph* Jack S. Margolis and Richard Clorfene, *A Child's Garden of Grass* (New York, Pocket Books edition, 1975), p. 26. [\(back\)](#)
2. "Only two effects": Andrew T. Weil, "Cannabis," *Science Journal* 5a: no. 3 (September 1969): 36-42. [\(back\)](#)
3. The Boston University study is described in Andrew T. Weil, Norman E. Zinberg, and Judith M. Nelsen, "Clinical and Psychological Effects of Marihuana in Man," *Science* 162 (13 December 1968): 1234-42. [\(back\)](#)

4. A complete list of effects, as recorded in the Weil-Zinberg experiments and in other studies, appears in the second appendix to this book. [\(back\)](#)
5. A fuller description of the effects of the major cannabinoids appears in chapter 1 l. [\(back\)](#)
6. Making hashish: *Marihuana Reconsidered*, p. 39. [\(back\)](#)
7. Tart: *On Being Stoned*, p. 13. [\(back\)](#)
8. William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1935), p. 298. [\(back\)](#)
9. Weil's view of altered states: Andrew Weil, *The Natural Mind*, p. 96. For another view of Weil's book, see Lester Grinspoon's review in the *New York Times Book Review*, (15 October 1972), pp. 26-28. [\(back\)](#)
10. The public's attitude toward drugs: see Norman E. Zinberg and John A. Robertson, *Drugs and the Public*. [\(back\)](#)
11. "Five brains": Joseph Berke and Calvin C. Hernton, *The Cannabis Experience*, p. 62. [\(back\)](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

2. The First Time

So grand a reward, so tiny a sin.
— Indian proverb [\[1\]](#)

Slow Beginnings

The great majority of smokers speak easily and fondly of their initial experience with marijuana. A number of smokers spoke in terms of *two* first times: the first time they tried marijuana and the first time they actually got high. It turns out that a surprisingly large number of smokers—perhaps as many as half, perhaps even more—did not get high on their initial attempt. This curious fact is one of the few aspects of marijuana use that has attracted serious thought and attention, although even here there are still unanswered questions.

The first marijuana experience is rarely ordinary and is seldom forgotten. Commonly, the novice smoker either feels nothing unusual, or else becomes extremely stoned, experiencing dramatic and sometimes memorable effects that may never again be equaled in their intensity. Normally, if the first time is pleasant, there will be others in its wake. If there seem to be no effects at all, the novice may be discouraged. Some beginning smokers, however, are actually relieved when nothing happens; this sets them at ease, since they understand that at least no uncontrollable or frightening event is about to take place.

In their 1968 study of the effects of marijuana, Weil and Zinberg found that "naive" users (subjects who had not tried marijuana prior to the study) did not become subjectively high in a neutral setting and showed only minor changes in measured physical responses to marijuana. One of the naive subjects, upon smoking marijuana for the first time and sensing that it wasn't the placebo, told the experimenters: "I have probably had something but it can't be marijuana because I would be more stoned than this."^[2] In fact, the only one of nine naive subjects who did get high during his first attempt was the young man who during the preliminary interviews had shown the most eagerness to try marijuana. In a different study, Erich Goode found that among the respondents to his questionnaire, 41 percent said they did not get high the first time, and another 13 percent weren't sure whether they did or not.^[3]

Not everybody who tries marijuana shows a noticeable response or undergoes a change of consciousness. Some people appear to be completely resistant or immune to marijuana; they don't, as the Jamaicans say, "have the head for it." "It really does happen," says Norman Zinberg. "There are people who refuse to accept or submit to the experience, who just do not metabolize it. The experience is there, but what people do with it is enormously variable."

It is not known whether or not the inability of some people to feel the effects of marijuana is determined physiologically. Many first-time smokers, consciously or not, simply refuse to let go; marijuana is a sufficiently subtle drug that the user must *want* to experience it. People who do not feel high after their first experience may well exhibit obvious physical effects, and laboratory studies have shown that volunteers may have red eyes, a dry mouth, and an increased heart rate without actually feeling anything different from their everyday, normal sense of reality.

Back in 1953, which in terms of marijuana research was still the dark ages, Howard S. Becker, the sociologist, published an essay entitled "Becoming a Marihuana User"; it has long enjoyed the status of a classic, not only among marijuana researchers but in general sociology as well.^[4] Becker's essay is important because it suggests a complete and compelling answer to the intriguing question of why so many marijuana smokers do not get high on their first attempt.

Becker argues that this may be because most people have to *learn* to use marijuana, and he outlines a three-step process by which this education occurs. The first phase is merely mechanical and involves learning the technique of inhaling the smoke. A joint, after all, is not smoked like a cigarette; marijuana smoke is most effective when held in the lungs for as long as possible. This can be difficult, initially, for the smoker of tobacco cigarettes to master, and almost impossible for the nonsmoker. Mezz Mezzrow, a white jazz musician whose book *Really the Blues* tells a great deal about marijuana use among American musicians between the wars, recalls that even he, the most celebrated smoker of his era, failed to get high the first time he tried:

I didn't feel a thing and I told him so. "Do you know one thing?" he said. "You ain't even smokin' it right. You got to hold that muggle so that it barely touches your lips, see, then draw in air around it. Say *tfff, tfff*, only

breathe in when you say it. Then don't blow it out right away, you got to give the stuff a chance." [5]

Since Mezzrow's time, and especially during the 1970S, there have been several new developments in the technology of smoking paraphernalia that have made the task of inhaling the smoke considerably easier. The most popular alternative to the marijuana cigarette is a water-cooled pipe known as a bong, which originated in Thailand two centuries ago. The bong allows the user to inhale smoke that may be cooled by ice cubes or tempered by hot water, or even both at once. In addition, there is always the option of eating marijuana, especially in baked goods, but this is more talked about than done. Among veteran smokers, the hand-rolled joint still prevails.

After the new user has mastered the proper smoking technique, he must move on to the second step in Becker's scheme, which is to perceive and experience the effects of the drug. *That these effects may already be present in the novice smoker is irrelevant unless and until they have been identified and recognized.* "The user must be able to point them out to himself and consciously connect them with his having smoked marijuana before he can have this experience," writes Becker. "Otherwise, regardless of the actual effect produced, he considers that the drug has no effect on him." [6]

The new user's ability to make this connection depends, as Becker sees it, on his having "faith (developed from observations of users who do get high) that the drug actually will produce some new experience" and on his willingness to continue trying it until it does. [7] But many first-time smokers, unaware of the complexity of this seemingly simple process, lack the patience to wait for the new experience to manifest itself and, more important, lack the knowledge even that patience is required. And so, not having undergone any observable changes on the first or second attempt, many would-be smokers assume that there is nothing in it for them and wonder, in some cases, if there is anything there at all. Presumably, there are several million Americans who have tried marijuana without experiencing any effect and who therefore believe themselves, incorrectly, to be immune to it. Indeed, many probably suspect that the whole enterprise is something of a hoax.

Becker's third and final step sounds at first a bit obvious: the user must learn to *enjoy* the effects he has just learned to recognize. Indeed, for all of the attendant pleasures described by its adherents, being high on marijuana is not intrinsically enjoyable for everyone, involving as it does the shock of another consciousness, frequent disorientation of time and space, occasional awareness of unconscious truths and processes that might easier be left unnoticed, and various physical discomforts such as hunger, fatigue, and dryness of the mouth. To many novice smokers, these annoyances may be more than enough to convince them that marijuana is considerably overrated.

While Becker's article represents the most complete answer to the question of why so many first-time users fail to get high, the question is still open. In part, the answer may have to do with the uniqueness of marijuana, whose effects are not directly comparable to anything else in the life of the novice smoker. The most common point of reference, naturally, is alcohol, and the person familiar with that form of intoxication may try

marijuana and wait in vain for a fairly concrete assault upon the senses, all the while remaining oblivious to the more subtle effects of cannabis.

Another possibility, according to some researchers, is that THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, is changed by an enzyme in the liver into the metabolite known as 11-hydroxy delta-9-THC; it is this metabolite, some scientists believe, rather than "raw" THC that causes the high. Since it is normally present in the body in only minute quantities, several smoking sessions may be required for the liver to start producing sufficient quantities to affect the user.

The First Time

Most marijuana smokers were introduced to marijuana by a friend, a teacher, a sibling, or a slightly more experienced companion. Others were first turned on at a party, on a date, or with a group of friends. None of the people in my sample reported using marijuana for the first time when they were alone, while Erich Goode found that only 3 percent of his respondents turned themselves on.^[8]

Although many people experience no effects at all, the opposite phenomenon is also common. Lenny recalls that he enjoyed his first smoking experience so much that he immediately bought two ounces, one of which he sold to a friend, thus becoming a user, a buyer, and a dealer all at once.

When the first experience is good, it is often memorable. A salesman from Michigan recalls:

I was starting to feel different. A fog started to separate me from my two friends. Charlene wanted to go back, so we piled into my brother's car and started back along the dirt road. I felt unsteady at the wheel, and Dan asked if I needed help. I said no. I saw a car approaching and pulled over to the side. It took ages before the car passed us, and I felt so foolishly happy.

We arrived back at the lake, and the water was peacefully beautiful. It felt as if this was the beauty and the peace I had always wanted. If I could express that beauty in words, I would be a poet.

A more typical description of the first time is offered by a French instructor at a small southern college, who was introduced to marijuana in 1965, when he was a senior:

I was nervous at the beginning. There was still a lot of bad press about what dope could do to you, and my family background was pretty strict and conservative. But a lot of people I admired were smoking pot, so I wanted to try it.

The first time I smoked, I became very nervous. I was also very open to suggestion; the friend who turned me on was himself nervous, and he reassured me a bit too much, which made me even more nervous.

The first time I *really* got high there was some Mozart playing, and Mozart had never sounded that way to me before.

This man's nervousness is typical; even the most casual marijuana smokers are nervous the first time they smoke. It may be for this reason, among others, that many male smokers develop a measure of bravado with regard to the drug.^[9] But almost everybody admits to having felt some nervousness the first time, and a few smokers recall that they delayed their initial marijuana experience for as long as two or three years, until curiosity finally triumphed over fear. Surely these fears, which were especially common among smokers who started using marijuana during the 1960s, go a long way toward explaining why so many first-time users fail to get high.

The existence of these fears makes sense. The marijuana experience takes place on a different level of reality than the one most people are familiar with, and the prospect of the change may well threaten the sense of control and stability of a person uneasy about letting go of normal, waking consciousness. Some smokers recall that during their first high, they developed a fear that they would undergo a permanent change and would never return to their "real" selves. Even those who are most eager to try marijuana usually cannot imagine realistically what it will be like, and fear follows easily on ignorance. "Everyone can feel the effects of grass," states *A Child's Garden of Grass*, long known as the unofficial Bible of marijuana users, "if they simply get over their fear of losing control."^[10]

For many smokers, especially during the 1960s, fears about marijuana, exacerbated by the mass media, had to be overcome and dealt with before the decision to smoke could be made with any degree of comfort. A former Radcliffe student recollects:

I had read all this stuff about grass—in *Life* and *Time* and that kind of magazine—and the writers would always be saying, "These poor children, on the road to heroin, thinking they are expanding their world but really on the road to losing themselves ... oh alas, alas, will no one stop this dire green menace?" And I started thinking: what if the jokers who wrote the articles are the ones who are wrong—since *their* inner worlds didn't seem exactly the more aware and expanded ones, from the way they wrote. And I also figured that something you smoked, instead of injecting, was unlikely to do anything dire the first time even if they were right. I was really too interested. I'd read Huxley and other people, too, and they didn't sound like they were doing drugs to escape from anything.^[11]

As marijuana use has increased, the fears of first-time users have diminished

accordingly, as have reports of bad trips. Still, the scare tactics and hysterical reports of a previous era linger on, if only subliminally. After seeing the most famous of the marijuana scare films of the 1930S, revived periodically in college towns to the delight of stoned audiences, one student told me: "Even though everybody knows that *Reefer Madness* is propaganda and nonsense, a little of the fear stays with you."

Accordingly, the most valuable function of the introducer is not so much to tell the novice what to do and how to smoke but rather to calm him down and assuage his fears, should that become necessary. These days, it seldom is. Occasionally, the introducer may also find himself providing a quick course in marijuana etiquette. A Boston actor tells of turning on an acquaintance who, as late as 1978, was completely unfamiliar with the world of marijuana:

It was a guy I didn't know too well. After we smoked he said to me, "What do I owe you?" He said he knew the stuff was expensive, and he seemed to think that if he didn't pay for it, the experience wasn't fully his own. I explained to him that dope is meant to be shared among friends, and I think he understood.

The Moment of Awareness

While parts of the marijuana experience change with cultural and social developments, other aspects remain constant. Here is Baudelaire on a characteristic response of novice smokers:

Most novices, of only the first degree of initiation, complain that hashish is slow in taking effect. They wait with childish impatience for it to do so; and then, when the drug does not function quickly enough to suit them, they indulge in a swaggering incredulity, which gives great delight to old initiates, who know just how hashish sets about its work.

Baudelaire might well have been commenting on the account of a young woman who was a senior in 1967 at a quiet Catholic college in upstate New York:

It was a very protective environment, but I had a boyfriend who got some pot, and he asked if I wanted to try it. I was nervous, but he convinced me that it was nothing more powerful than aspirin. I was sitting there in the car after taking a few hits, saying, "Ah, nothing's happening, it's such a waste." I kept repeating myself, saying over and over that nothing was happening. At this point my boyfriend was beside himself with laughter, realizing that I

was stoned out of my mind.

I realize now that when I don't think I'm stoned, and I feel I have to ask, then I probably am. If I'm not stoned, I don't have to ask the question. [12]

It is still common for new smokers to repeatedly ask, "Am I stoned?" or to insist over and over that they are not. "How do I *know* I'm stoned?" some ask earnestly. When two novices decide to smoke together, and there is no experienced smoker with them, the results can be quite funny, with each one trying to decipher clues from the other. This is what happened in the case of a humanistic psychologist who first tried marijuana while teaching at a small rural college in the Midwest:

I was with another fellow, also a teacher, and both of us were trying marijuana for the first time. And we got into this funny situation, a kind of circle, or knot. How could we know which of us was stoned? He was saying that I was stoned, and I was saying, "No, I'm not stoned; I only look stoned to you because *you're* stoned." We had very little to go on, not knowing what to expect, how we would feel, or anything. It's clear, years later, that we were both wrecked.

It generally takes time—years, in some cases—for the novice to understand and appreciate the full range of effects and possibilities of this altered state of consciousness. Indeed, most smokers never experience more than a small portion of that range, some because they don't care to, others because they have established for themselves very strict limits, such as smoking only at parties, for example, or only on weekend evenings. There is a trade-off for such people: their stoned experiences may be limited, but their sense of control over the drug—no trivial matter—is usually secure.

Those who began smoking marijuana in college during the mid-1960s were often heavily influenced by media reports about it. The media erroneously lumped marijuana together with psychedelic drugs, implying that marijuana leads to exotic and hallucinatory experiences, which is only rarely true in the United States. Ironically, many college students tried marijuana anticipating the reactions they had read about in *Newsweek*, which in turn was purporting to describe what the college students were experiencing, producing a circle of ignorance that benefited nobody. But because LSD and marijuana are both mind-altering drugs that came into public awareness at roughly the same time, they were frequently confused, although they are radically different substances. Indeed, some students tried LSD rather casually, assuming that the reports about it were no more true than the reports about marijuana.

And so the novice smoker of the 1960s kept waiting for the cosmic light show to begin, while back on earth there were more immediate and mundane matters to deal with. Sarah, now a teacher, a mother, and a daily smoker, first tried marijuana in 1968, while a student at Wellesley College. She was introduced to marijuana by three male friends. "God," she

recalls thinking, "they must be so incredibly smart, smoking and talking at the same time!" A few moments later, when she had to go to the bathroom, she was afraid of not being able to get there. "I was worried that I wouldn't be able to walk down the hall," she says, "but everyone assured me that if you did things when you were high you would do them normally, even if you didn't think you could." It turns out that going to the bathroom was for many novices the first real test of whether they could function normally after smoking marijuana; despite some initial nervousness, nobody reported failure. Today, many of these same people think nothing of driving, going to work, or even giving a lecture while they are stoned.

Many smokers can recall the exact moment they first realized they were high. A Florida man recalls being on the roof of an apartment building overlooking a city on a spring night. A joint was circulating, and he asked to try it:

After about seven tokes I noticed that the lights of the town were taking on a weird, dazzling look. I had already cultivated the ability to see lights this way by keeping my eyes motionless, so that the after-images built up. These images, I had discovered, were an effective jumping-off point to fantasy worlds. Marijuana, I decided, made this process a lot easier, and I was very pleased. Later, walking back to my room, I was intrigued by the way things felt and looked. I decided that I had discovered something pretty damn good.

Combined with this excitement there was also a measure of disappointment for what marijuana did *not* represent:

For the rest of that spring, I spent one or two evenings a week smoking with friends and listening to music. I enjoyed this a great deal, but I did not find what I was really after. I had been fascinated by the term "altered states of consciousness," and I would stare into the light bulb on those stoned nights, trying to penetrate the Veil through whatever opening the light bulb might provide. No luck.

The images I was able to induce by closing my eyes were entertaining, but none of it *led* anywhere. I was looking for something much more intense. What I was really looking for, I now realize, was what I received from LSD. But that's another story.

Some smokers recall that their first experience was more than disappointing. A graduate student in Philadelphia reports that the first time he smoked, it tasted like eating a combination of burning charcoal and hot peanut butter. A man who was in the navy, stationed on Hawaii in 1969, had a very unpleasant first trip. Bad trips on marijuana are statistically minuscule, but they do occur—especially the first time. The navy man was

driving with a friend one night and was talked into sharing a joint with him while riding through the pineapple fields:

The first thing I felt was a strange sort of numbness spreading up the back of my head. I started to worry that I was going to black out. I kept driving, and then I started worrying about whether I could keep the car on the road. I think I was driving pretty well at the time, but I became terribly conscious of the dangers involved, and terribly uneasy about whether or not I could cope with these dangers while high. It got so bad that my companion offered to drive, and I gladly let him. We drove back to the barracks, and I remember as we approached the parking lot that I was scared to death that we would run into a military cop who would know that we were high on grass, and not just drunk.

But the vast majority of first-time experiences are either neutral or pleasant. Sometimes the first high is punctuated by unexpected and inexplicable laughter and sometimes by a clear, new visual perception of familiar objects. Both of these phenomena happened to a writer who works at a Washington think tank:

I got a classic case of the giggles but unclassically, I found that I could stop them by a sufficient effort of the will. If I did, however, the entire universe tilted before my eyes to an incline of about forty-five degrees, and the only way I could straighten out the world was to let go and laugh. This felt to me like some weird kind of $e=mc^2$; that is, emotional looseness had some kind of relationship to spatial perception, structure, and the rightness of the world. In other words, my world made sense only if I let myself go, especially in laughter. I was a pretty square, uptight, antiwar liberal back then, not interested in spiritual life, or in my own identity, or in laughing. It was a major lesson for me.

A Montana man offers a more elaborate version of the laughing experience during his first high:

I walked out of the room and watched a tennis match. I turned to ask somebody what the score was, and then I questioned what words I had used. I thought I had said "Whjabbaja babjalla?" Then I remembered that I had gotten an answer to my question, so perhaps I was wrong. I still hadn't attributed my behavior to the pot. Finally, at dinner, someone said something funny, and I couldn't stop laughing. I must have been a spectacle, but it was great. Then and only then did I realize that the pot had hit me.

For other smokers, the first moment of stoned awareness is marked by an unmistakable change in auditory or visual perception. A medical student in San Francisco recalls:

I didn't realize that I was stoned until I got home from a friend's house, turned off the lights, and turned on "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" by the Iron Butterfly. I got incredibly freaked out by the music. At first, I was really frightened, because I couldn't understand why I felt this way—until I remembered that I had smoked.

A teacher in Oregon recalls turning on her best friend:

We were in a group of people, and a joint was being passed around. She reached for it—she had never smoked before—and I said, "Now you know you don't have to if you don't want to." I was worried that she might feel pressured to smoke. She said she knew what she was doing and proceeded to take three tokes. She coughed a little, and after a while I saw her staring at the trees out of the window. I said, "Kathy, what are you staring at?" She said she never noticed how beautiful the trees were. I knew then she was high.

A woman in her late fifties who lives on a farm in Maine reports a similar experience. The first time she smoked, nothing happened. Her two daughters, who had encouraged her the first time, tried again a few weeks later. Still no results.

Then, the third time, I had a little more to smoke, and I noticed a piece of glass sculpture on the windowsill that had caught the sun. And I found myself staring at this sculpture, which was glowing. I had never noticed before how beautiful it was. This was the first time I noticed any effect.

An elderly New York woman reports a variation on this theme. She claims she was sent a package of seeds in an envelope with a note saying, "Plant these for size." She did, and one of her friends recognized the plant and rolled two cigarettes for her. "At this point," she writes, "I would like to say I am on Medicare along with most of my friends. I think we are considered little old ladies in sneakers—which no doubt we are." She continues:

So we smoked. Nothing happened except a deep sense of relaxation, which was nice. Since I've never been able to drink, I understood why liquor was so much in demand. I live on the thirty-first floor of my building, and there is a drugstore off the lobby where I buy the evening paper. I rang for the

elevator. The trip down was endless, and the lobby was miles away. I got there, bought the paper, wandered through the desert of the lobby for forty years, got on the elevator and flew home.

I had left the radio on and it was playing the most heavenly music I've ever heard. The pianist was making each note sound clear and rounded and perfect. I was held until the record was over. Then the announcer said that the pianist was Liberace and that strange and evocative music was "Traumerei" by Schumann. I decided to get rid of the Mary Jane at once.

As with many other facets of life, what a person brings to the marijuana experience will largely determine what he gets out of it. Steve, now a car salesman, first tried marijuana in his adolescence, when he was involved in a quest for truth, meaning, and values:

For me it was an intellectual thing. I'd ask a question, and I'd have to have the answer to it. I wasn't smoking for fun. These were huge questions like: what is the meaning and purpose of life? Here I was getting high, and saying to myself that I've got to have the answer to the questions I was asking. Marijuana didn't provide those answers, but it did help, and it stimulated more questions.

Mark, who is married to Sarah from Wellesley, started smoking ten years ago as a Harvard freshman. He works in the computer-design field; back then, he smoked to better understand the workings of his own mind:

I was a philosophy major. The fundamental question on my mind was what is beauty. My roommate and I started smoking grass as an experiment; we would spend hours getting stoned and taping ourselves being stoned and talking about it. I have always been very interested in how people's heads work. What is this process called thinking, and how does it work? My early experiences with drugs were originally intended to understand what was going on in my own mind.

Some users become interested in the serious side of marijuana even before trying it. Others come to it only after years of smoking, while some users are simply not interested in using marijuana as a tool for exploring their minds and hearts. Similarly, some first-time users begin smoking fairly quickly, while others try marijuana after so lengthy a deliberation that their first experience may be more a matter of "when" than "whether." This caution was more typical of the 1960s. Looking back on those years, David recalls that he wanted to try marijuana as a junior in college but didn't actually take the plunge until after graduation:

I had an older friend, Mel, who seemed to me very wise and full of good advice on the business of life. I told him I wanted to try marijuana, and I asked him what he thought. I knew he would be against it, but I wanted a reason for my own opposition. He gave me one: "You'd be a shmuck to try it." Now Mel and I had a fairly deep friendship, and he was often saying wise and pithy things. His answer made sense to me at the time and served its purpose for three years—until I finally realized it was bullshit and began to smoke.

Sometimes the initial marijuana experience can be planned and prepared for. Mark tells of introducing a friend to grass by reading her selected passages from the chapter on "Turning On" in Lester Grinspoon's book *Marihuana Reconsidered*. Several smokers mentioned that they did research on marijuana before taking their first toke. For others, the experience was more spontaneous, as with a teacher from California who recalls:

I remember thinking to myself, "Here goes." It was almost like losing my virginity. Nothing happened for an hour. Then, walking along the beach with friends, I suddenly began to notice that the whitecaps were rolling onto the shore like angels of God sweeping in over some kind of grassy, wet meadow.

While actual hallucinations are rare with marijuana, it is common for a smoker to experience an altered perception, to be struck by a particularly forceful and vivid image. The California teacher didn't claim to *see* angels of God, although under LSD he might have. With marijuana, he is far more likely to be struck by a concrete image such as "this is what angels of God might look like."

Naturally, a particular challenge for the novice smoker is to determine exactly where subjective change ends and objective "normal" reality begins. In other words, he must answer the implicit question: "Which world should I believe in when the two realities tell me different things?" The new user frequently wants to know if he *looks* different when he is stoned and often goes off to seek the answer in the nearest mirror. A college student in Baltimore who first got stoned at a medieval festival in New York, recalls: "I had the strong feeling that I looked different, I was nervous, and afraid that everyone knew I was stoned." She had taken a camera with her, and she asked her friends to take some pictures so that she could see, later on, how she had actually looked that day. I asked her how the pictures turned out, and she looked at me as though the question made no sense. Indeed, by the time I asked, it probably didn't. "They turned out absolutely normal," she replied. "I simply looked happy. I guess the changes were all inside."

Another mark of the first-time experience are feelings of happiness and confidence. A young man who, like several other users here, smoked his first joint on a hill behind his

high school, recalls:

At first I was thinking that there was no reaction, no effect. "This isn't working," I thought. And then suddenly I stopped and said, "Dave, I feel funny." And I started looking at everything differently. Things seemed funnier. And I became much less inhibited, and I started running down the hill toward the school, yelling "BANZAI!"

Sometimes the initial experience is very dramatic, much more so than subsequent smoking. An occupational therapist who had smoked several times without getting high found herself in an encounter group that celebrated its final session with a party. She evidently had smoked a good deal, finding herself at one point passing two pipes at once and holding a third one between her teeth:

I was having a fine time and wasn't really thinking about being stoned until suddenly I had the sensation that I was simultaneously blacking out and yet was completely aware of everything around me. I was teetering between oblivion and total consciousness. It was an incredible experience. I don't think I recognized what was happening until I attempted to call out a phone message, which was dissolved in laughter; I knew then I was no longer in control of things.

What followed was a long evening of wide-eyed amazement as I found myself in a new dimension of time: the absolute present. There was no past moment and no future moment—at least, none that was connected to any sense of reality. There was only the very, very immediate present which changed with every fraction of a second, and I had total control of it.

Every passing moment dissipated, and I entered a new state of oblivion. The only time this feeling has ever been duplicated for me was when I had to give a lecture to a group of students. Panic-stricken, I spoke each word automatically and enthusiastically, not knowing how I had started each sentence, or how on earth I intended to finish it.

For many first-time smokers, the experience stands as a life-changing event. Joining the company of fellow-smokers can represent a major change, which has implications for other events and other decisions. A Vermont man in his mid-twenties recalls his first experience, which occurred while he was in high school:

Weeks of thought had gone into that decision, and starting to smoke was for me the end of a long internal debate between two very different world-views.

According to one, life was basically simple: all that needed to be done

was to choose a path and then follow it with little deviation, and all would be well; problems would be resolved even before they appeared. If I did well in school, decided on a professional career, became active with the right crowd and didn't knock against the surface of things, then life would be, well, *life*. This path, in other words, would not represent a struggle for the person who chose it. On the contrary: it would reflect the substance and the personality of the chooser. The actual choice would occur unconsciously, like the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The trouble arose for me when I realized that there lay within me another world-view, one that would not go away even when I wanted it to, and one that had to be contended with. It said that the surface of things was not always an accurate gauge of the way things really were, that people who seemed to fit into their prepared niches were not inherently better or smarter than those who were still searching. The world was different than what you were told it would be, and the voice of authority was not always in possession of the best or wisest way to be—or to behave. If you held a complex view of things, like this second world-view, you could never pretend to have a simple view, and life, far from becoming simpler and more knowable as you got older, became instead more complicated, more complex and entangled. There would be other choices to make.

Deciding to smoke marijuana put me squarely in the second camp, and I knew it. The undramatic first episode did not signal any change of heart, any turning back. The decision had been made to become a smoker and to accept the ambiguity of the smoking world, not to mention its dangers—these were the days of jail sentences for possession, not to mention the popular belief that marijuana led to heroin—and not to mention the defiance of parents, teachers, and society at large.

Notes

1. Sometimes referred to as a "Hindu Proverb," this is actually a Muslim catch-phrase recorded by J. M. Campbell, Assistant English Opium Commissioner of Bombay, in an appendix to the 1894 *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report*. [\(back\)](#)

2. "I have probably had something": Norman E. Zinberg and Andrew Weil, "Cannabis: The First Controlled Experiment," *New Society* 16 (January 1969): 84-86. [\(back\)](#)

3. Goode: *The Marijuana Smokers*, pp. 135-36. [\(back\)](#)

4. Howard S. Becker: "Becoming a Marihuana User," *American Journal of Sociology* 59

(1953): 235-42. Becker's essay also appears as chapter 3 of his book, *Outsiders: Studies in The Sociology of Deviance*, pp. 41-58. [\(back\)](#)

5. Milton Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (New York, 1946), p. 71. Reprinted in David Ebin, ed., *The Drug Experience*, p. 87. [\(back\)](#)

6. "The user": *Outsiders*, p. 49. [\(back\)](#)

7. "Faith": *Ibid.* [\(back\)](#)

8. 3 percent, Goode: *The Marijuana Smokers*, p. 123. [\(back\)](#)

9. In my interviews, I noticed an interesting difference between men and women. In many cases, the men I spoke with affected a posture of considerable knowledge and experience, whether or not it was warranted. Similarly, many women who were clearly experienced and informed about marijuana did not take their knowledge seriously, and often underestimated their own sophistication with regard to smoking. While "marijuana machismo" is not confined to men, I was struck by the differences between the two groups. Moreover, this posturing among men was in evidence even among those men who have consciously allowed their values and attitudes to be changed as a result of the women's movement; perhaps marijuana brings out pockets of resistance. [\(back\)](#)

10. *A Child's Garden of Grass*: p. 22. [\(back\)](#)

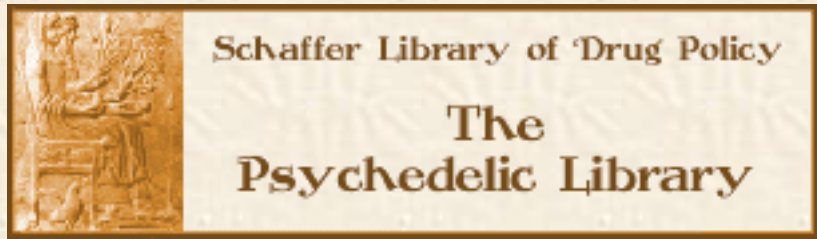
11. Radcliffe: Dianne Bennett, "Marihuana Use Among College Students and Street People" (Senior Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1970) . [\(back\)](#)

12. Baudelaire: in *The Drug Experience*, p. 21. [\(back\)](#)

Chapter 3

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

3. Marijuana Activities I: Food and Music

I'd like to spend the last hour of my life stoned with my friends in a Chinese restaurant.

—a smoker in Denver

The Munchies

While committed marijuana smokers will do anything stoned that they do otherwise, there are three especially popular marijuana-related activities: eating, listening to music, and sex. The first two are discussed here; sex will be dealt with in chapter 5.

Of the three, the desire to eat is the only activity that is a direct result of smoking marijuana, and an increased appetite may be the closest thing to a universal response to cannabis, although in a few countries, like Jamaica, marijuana is sometimes used to dull the desire for food.

"I always enjoy eating," observes an Arizona smoker, "but it is especially great when I'm high. I find myself tasting each ingredient separately: the garlic, the salt, the sugar, and all the rest. I can actually feel my taste buds working." Some smokers find that marijuana has led to the development of a more sophisticated palate, with increased sensitivity to various spices, and less emphasis on sweets; most report an increased craving for sweet foods.

The scientific connection between marijuana and eating was established only recently, in a series of experiments in Palo Alto and in Berkeley. Both of these studies confirmed

what smokers have long known anyway: subjects given marijuana were far more interested in eating.

The real question is not whether this is true but why. For many years it was thought that marijuana led to hypoglycemia, a lowering of the blood sugar. While that sounded like a reasonable enough explanation, there was no evidence to prove it. The Boston University experiments of Weil and Zinberg laid that myth to rest, presumably to the embarrassment of the American Medical Association, which had declared it to be true only a year earlier.

Looking back on the experiments, Andrew Weil recalls his own skepticism about the alleged connection between marijuana and blood sugar levels. "If blood sugar drops seriously enough to cause a hunger for sweets," he recalls thinking, "there are probably going to be a lot of other symptoms as well. So I tried to trace back the laboratory findings supporting the link, and much to my amazement, I discovered that there weren't any. That turned out to be quite typical of those days; there were many statements in the literature, and you'd go to check them out, only to discover that nobody had done the experiments. One textbook would copy it from another textbook, entirely without evidence."

Marijuana smokers often claim they will eat anything when they are high, and there are tales of famished smokers devouring whole loaves of bread (to say nothing of cakes and pies) when nothing else is around. One woman says she sometimes eats fistfuls of brown sugar, while another tells of pouring chocolate syrup over a bowl of natural cereal, but only, she assured me, "in an emergency." People who are high on marijuana tend to show a marked preference for sweet foods and beverages, particularly such items as ice cream and candy. Indeed, many smokers who are otherwise sensitive to matters of health and nutrition will indulge in junk food after smoking marijuana. This phenomenon is commonly known as "getting the munchies." A high school girl in the Midwest writes that "at this stage a person eats everything in sight and experiences no gain in weight." The truth, alas, is less benign, and one of the most often-cited reasons for giving up marijuana is that it has led the smoker to gain too much weight. (At the same time, the fact that marijuana *is in itself* free of calories has been a factor in leading some relatively older users to switch to it from the more fattening drug, alcohol.)

There is no known pharmacological explanation to account for the connection between marijuana and the desire to eat, and there is even some debate as to whether smokers actually feel hungry, or whether they merely find eating to be unusually pleasurable, with food tasting better than it normally does. Whatever the answer—and there appears to be merit to both claims—there are several theories to explain the link between marijuana and eating.

According to one view, marijuana allows the user to recall more vividly the taste of certain foods and bring to the surface a subconscious human desire for sweets. Others believe that marijuana simply lowers inhibitions, especially around oral activities. Lenny, the businessman from New England, offers a third opinion:

We get the munchies because dope is a stimulant. Hyperphagia sets in—the desire to eat more. We become more sensitive to any sensual stimulation: a peach will taste peachier, bread will taste breadier. The sensual stimulation

gets amplified. People who think that dope makes them hungrier are being fooled by their desire to eat.

There are other explanations as well. Laurence McKinney believes that marijuana causes the smoker to notice small hunger tremors that are always present but usually ignored, an explanation similar to Howard Becker's account of marijuana's physical effects. Finally, there is the view that the munchies are by now so much a part of the typical marijuana experience that they represent part of the cultural expectation of smokers and occur simply for that reason.

Whatever the reasons, the link between marijuana and the desire to eat is so compelling that investigations have recently been undertaken to explore the potential uses of marijuana in the treatment of *anorexia nervosa*, a neurological disorder affecting young women, who find food so distasteful that they literally starve themselves. A California woman tells of her teenage sister, who suffers from this disease, coming home one evening after smoking her first joint. She not only ate dinner for the first time in years but finished the food on everybody else's plate as well. The family was thrilled. "My mother didn't question anything," recalls the sister. "She just assumed that she had finally succeeded with her cooking."

Dr. Norman Zinberg has been conducting research through the National Institute of Health to determine whether and how marijuana might be used in the treatment of anorectic patients. What happens, he reports, is that the patients do get hungry after smoking marijuana, but then they quit the study. "The fact that it's working makes it not work," says Zinberg. "They leave the hospital. They think marijuana makes them aggressive and unpleasant, and they ascribe to it very different properties than other people do. But it does make them hungry."

The munchies are such a routine part of being stoned that many people make sure to have certain foods on hand before they smoke. One user, calling himself "the perfect stoned host," prides himself on his "munchies drawer"; it consists of partitioned cubicles, each filled with a different kind of miniature candy bar. "My friends go wild when I open it," he says.

A college student in Indiana recalls being caught in the dormitory one night with a bad case of the munchies. Nothing in the neighborhood was open, his friends had fallen asleep, and he found himself wandering around the basement with a twenty dollar bill in his hand, staring dumbly at the vending machines. "Really," he recalls, "it was enough to make a grown head cry." He vowed never again to be caught unprepared:

My friends and I got really organized about the whole thing. If we knew we were going to smoke, one of us would be chosen to make a food run. We'd all chip in and make suggestions, and the person who went to the store would have the final say in what was chosen. We got into the fine points of the munchies. For example, would we prefer sugar or salt? I mean, it's a real drag to be stuck with Twinkies and Milky Ways when what you really crave

are Doritos and pistachio nuts. I used to fantasize about hollowed-out watermelons filled with fruit—in the middle of January. But my favorite foods were bagels dripping with cream cheese and butter, and Drake's Coffee Cakes.

As with every sensual experience, smokers become involved in the details of physical pleasure. After describing how she and a friend had recently consumed an entire bowl of frosting without bothering to wait for the cake to finish baking, Claire explained what interests her about eating while stoned:

Have you ever seen a magnified view of the human tongue? It looks like a bunch of toadstools in a field. And I get this incredible vision of the frosting dripping over the taste buds. It's so intense that it's almost sickening, especially if you eat too much.

Evidently, it is possible to overcome the munchies, and several smokers with weight problems have reported *losing* weight with the aid of marijuana. One woman tells of shedding fifty-eight pounds in one year without cutting back on smoking. "I just keep fruits and vegetables around," she explains, "and prepare dietetic munchies right after I get home from work. By 6:30 or so, I can get stoned for the night, and I often do. Booze was killing me, but smoke has made me a slim and happy lady."

Another woman reports losing thirty pounds in a similar effort:

I simply convinced myself never to have the munchies. Instead I did a lot of thinking, and a lot of listening to music and dancing I lost weight by controlling my impulses and substituting other stoned activities for eating.

More commonly, smokers who are conscious of their weight will make a special effort to overcome their predisposition toward sweets or else will be careful to smoke before meals rather than afterward. As an antidote to gaining weight on marijuana, *A Child's Garden of Grass* recommends pistachio nuts, because although they are fattening, they taste good and take a long time to eat.^[1]

Sandy, a writer of short stories, reports that when she worked as a waitress, the one thing she really hated was serving stoned people. She found them to be crass, prone to fits of giggling, and inconsiderate. "They just about wore me out, making me run back and forth with everything on the menu. What pigs!" Sandy tells of the following incident, which occurred in Rochester, New York:

A local restaurant had a Wednesday special, a dozen steamed clams for ninety-nine cents. In these parts, that's quite a bargain. Some friends of mine

who had voracious appetites normally used to go in there stoned and *really eat*. No kidding, each one of those guys could eat *at least* twelve dozen clams! Anyway, I went there myself on Wednesday afternoon, thinking I'd have a nice lunch. I was informed that the special had been discontinued. The waitress told me that a group of guys (whom I easily recognized from her description) had nearly run the owner out of business by eating so much. The moral of the story: inconsiderate heads can ruin it for the rest of us.

Sandy is not the only one who is annoyed by the behavior of smokers who have the munchies. "R., the dope connoisseur," who writes a monthly column for *High Times*, finds the whole idea of the munchies repugnant, calling it a throwback to the "reefer madness" images of marijuana smokers going out of control.^[2] He doesn't doubt that marijuana increases one's desire to eat, but he insists that the current passion for junk food is without basis in fact or necessity, and he urges his fellow smokers to set aside their bad habits in favor of nutritional eating. Every other sensual experience, he points out, is enhanced by marijuana; why should eating be degraded?

R. attributes the myth that junk food best satisfies the munchies to several sources, among them the fact that during the 1960s most marijuana smoking was done late at night, when the only places to satisfy one's hunger were fast-food chains and stores open all night. R. calls upon smokers to effect a revolution in their stoned eating habits. Colombian grass, he suggests, goes especially well with heavy meats, fruits, and vegetables, while Thai sticks he finds more appropriate to hot and spicy Eastern dishes: "Somehow the clarity of the Thai high permits each note of flavor in the symphony to peal out its piquant fullness and yet still chime in complex harmonies played upon the palate."

Music

For the American smoker, listening to music is almost as basic to the marijuana experience as matches and ashtrays; one user speaks of a "hunger for music" whenever she smokes. The phenomenal growth in the recording and stereo components industries and the spectacular boom in FM radio over the past two decades are directly related to the rise in marijuana consumption.

Smokers continually claim that music sounds "richer" when they are stoned. As was the case with eating, scientific investigation in this area has turned up very little, probably because researchers have been asking the wrong questions.

While most of the studies involving auditory perception under the influence of marijuana have concentrated on the hearing abilities of smokers, in actual fact smokers do not claim to hear better, but rather that music *sounds better*, a crucial difference. Marijuana users do not report that the drug enables them to distinguish unusually high or low notes, or to hear very soft sounds; they claim rather, to hear sounds *differently*, more

vividly and more intensely. Some researchers have concluded that the reports of smokers regarding music are too subjective to be taken seriously, but this is too narrow and self-defeating a view; the experience, after all, *is* subjective, and it may be impossible to measure in scientific ways.

Clearly, there is a process by which marijuana affects the hearing of its users, but it seems more likely that changes are mental rather than purely auditory. As Andrew Weil explains it, cannabis affects the secondary perception of sensory data, not its primary reception. It would naturally be easier to study the functioning of the human ear than to explore how the brain interprets what the ear receives. But that, very likely, is where the answers lie.

Weil suggests that incoming sensory information, such as the auditory signals that represent music, normally follow established and familiar pathways as they travel from their source to human consciousness.^[3] Weil believes that marijuana may interfere with the normal routing of these sensations, forcing the sensory data to find "novel routes to consciousness and thus be perceived in novel ways." This explanation, he suggests, would help account for many smokers' claims that when they are high, they see things for the first time "as they really are," or why they pay special attention to aspects of auditory or visual sensations that they might otherwise fail to notice.

I asked marijuana smokers to tell me exactly which music selections they found most enjoyable when they were stoned, but the responses covered the entire range of popular and classical music. These days, in contrast to the 1960s, smokers generally listen to the same music whether or not they are high. The "acid rock" phenomenon of a few years ago, in which certain rock music was designed to appeal deliberately to the stoned listener, seems to have faded, probably because it is no longer necessary.

Many younger smokers assert that the real value of marijuana in listening to music is that it enables them to understand and more fully respond to the *lyrics* of the songs they listen to, especially those that otherwise appear difficult or obscure. But by far the most familiar claim made by smokers is that marijuana enhances the ability to hear the distinct lines of several instruments at once, helping the listener to better grasp how the various instruments interact to produce the music:

When I'm high, I can hear all the individual parts of the music playing together to create a harmonious whole. I never heard music this way before I started smoking grass. Sometimes it feels almost as if I become the music, not only hearing it but feeling it and seeing it, absorbing it until it becomes part of me. Each instrument and voice takes on an identity of its own while continuing to be true to the whole. In short, when I'm high, I realize why music is considered one of the arts.

Similarly, several smokers mentioned that it was under the influence of marijuana that they first understood and appreciated the purpose and the effects of stereo.

A Radcliffe student who had been having trouble in her music course and was unable to

recognize individual selections found marijuana to be very helpful. She had formerly listened mostly to rock, and she gradually realized that it made fewer demands on the listener than the music she was now studying. One night she got stoned and listened to a Bach harpsichord concerto:

I don't have to tell you the beauty of it; I shouldn't have had to get stoned to hear that. But it all made sense; I heard the orchestra imitating the harpsichord, then turning what it was doing upside down into inversions. And I went into Leona's room and she gave me the score with this half-smile on her face. Even though I couldn't hear the music then, I could follow the lines, hearing and seeing three or four parts at a time. And during this time, I was almost crying, thinking: "This is real; I may be on a drug, but this is here all the time!"^[4]

She has since learned to appreciate music without marijuana, an example of integrating stoned consciousness into her straight life. But she hasn't given up smoking, explaining that "it still helps to have my hearing sort of opened up every now and then, so I can hear many parts going on at once."

The ability to distinguish various musical lines can make the stoned listener more sensitive than usual to the differences between individual instruments, as an Iowa man explains:

I greatly enjoy listening to loud rock music on the stereo when I'm stoned. The rhythm seems more solid and inspiring, and each cymbal, each drum, each guitar and every other instrument and voice seems more distinct, more clear. I really get into the music and feel immersed in the bass, with all the other instruments cutting through and the parts fitting so intricately together.

I sometimes use headphones for a better stereo effect. The music seems even more realistic, and feels like it's not only around me, but *inside my head*. The instruments and parts move from the left channel to the right, and vice versa, and seem to be running around inside my head, which makes it more intense. Sometimes I close my eyes and fantasize that I'm back at the concert with all its excitement.

Several smokers spoke of various mental and visual associations stimulated by listening to music when they were high. For example, hearing a saxophone will make Claire aware of the breath that goes through the instrument. She says she can often see the instrument in her mind and can make out the discrete finger movements of the musicians. Other stoned listeners use the occasion to let their minds wander:

As you listen, your mind makes you think. You get a kind of fantasy out of an enlarged imagination, depending on what you're listening to. With Marshall Tucker, you think of ripping across the desert on a bullet-speed horse in search of wild women and hard times. Listen to Loggins and Messina and you will sail on a boat as you lie on your couch, feeling the wind in your hair, and sincerity in your heart. Some people really get into it with acid rock and feel as though they are in front of the crowd playing the music, tossing their hair back and forth and sweating as they rip the damn chords off the guitar. It's reality taken by fantasy, cooked in your mind and poured back out, with the mind putting it all together as it goes along at no set pace.

In most cases this kind of mental wandering enhances the music, but for at least one listener, this is not the case:

I have listened stoned to some of the most emotionally committed singers in rock and blues—Robert Johnson, Bob Dylan, Muddy Waters, Van Morrison—musicians who constantly surprise me and move me under normal circumstances. Instead of getting an enhanced sense of whatever terrors and delights they are singing about, I just get the giggles. I can't help imagining their faces wrenched into comically distorted grimaces as they sing.

For the majority of smokers, though, music is made more enjoyable and more expansive by marijuana. A man who used to be a jazz critic pays special attention to the rhythm and the percussion of the music he listens to while stoned:

When I started smoking, I got into music, listening with rapt attention for a long time, especially to jazz. I started to hear music differently, and it's related to my experience of time. Rhythm, after all, is sound occurring in time; it's not just the pitch or the timbre which makes music, but the way the notes are spaced out. When music is really together in time, like a good jazz group playing, or African drummers, where precise perception of time is a fundamental aesthetic ingredient—I really appreciate that when I'm stoned.

Time is flowing and music is constant movement. You can't ever stop and grasp it, it's always moving... but when time is perfect, when everybody is together, it just floats and then becomes solid. I can't describe it beyond that. It's just a solid thing happening, like a huge rock, or a wall; it's just *there*.

His wife, a musician, reports a similar experience:

Since I've been smoking pretty regularly, I think I have become more aware of some subtleties I had been missing before. Things like cross-rhythms and unusual harmonic functions have started to jump out at me. Before, it would have taken several hearings or playings to find them. Now, they seem to find me.

Younger smokers speak enthusiastically of going stoned to rock concerts or, more often, of getting stoned during the concert:

I went slightly buzzed to a Jethro Tull concert and planned on smoking a whole lot during the show. I ate a bag of peanuts and some pretzels before the music began, and then resumed smoking once they started playing. I lit joint after joint, bowl after bowl, waiting to get blown away, but not even giving myself a chance to feel what I had already smoked. The music was great. I remember watching a fabulous drum solo which was so perfect and exact that my mind just couldn't grasp it. The solo went on and on, hard and powerful; it ran strong and intricate, yet its end was never predictable. Just as I thought it would end, the drummer would roll out again and keep it going. Finally, when he did stop, I was exhausted.

While younger smokers are attending rock concerts, relatively older users are becoming increasingly interested in other kinds of music, particularly jazz and classical, a trend that is almost certain to continue in the next few years. Jenny, a therapist, recalls a college experience that changed her musical tastes:

I was taking a course in music appreciation, and it was the first time I really listened to classical music. We studied Beethoven's Third Symphony, and took it apart piece by piece, instrument by instrument, and talked about it as a composite structural entity, a blending of many different parts into one complete unit.

So there I was, one night in my apartment, with two friends who were also taking this course. We got very stoned and started listening to the symphony. I started conducting, and my friends took on the task of playing, imaginarily, various instruments. By this time I knew the piece cold. But I also felt what made those instruments work together, what made the music so great. I was on top, in command of the synthesis of these various component parts, and it was incredible. I was at one with the music. I heard the beauty of how it all blended together, and the genius of the outcome was phenomenal.

"Every time you hear a piece of music," says Lenny, "you get another memory of it, and you build up a tape of how it sounds—in your mind. Each time you take it in, you're comparing it to a previous time, and it usually is pretty close. Eventually you get used to it; 'oh *that*,' you say, 'the Eroica.' But when you're stoned, it suddenly comes in differently, at double volume, as it were, and it just doesn't fit against the tape. So you end up hearing the music in a whole new way."

Playing Music

The first thing I noticed was that I began to hear the saxophone as though it was inside my head.... All the notes came easing out of my horn, like they's already been made up, greased and stuffed into the bell, so all I had to do was blow a little and send them on their way, one right after the other, never missing, never behind time, all without an ounce of effort.

—Mezz Mezzrow, *Really the Blues* [5]

Jazz musicians have long known that marijuana leads to a greater enjoyment of the music. Some, like the venerable Mezzrow, have claimed it makes them play better as well. Others disagree. A jazz pianist who has observed marijuana use over several decades says:

Our experience in the band is that very often we thought we were terrific, ingenious, clever and swinging, and then we would discover that we had been playing the same thing over twenty-five times. When we heard a recording of what we had played, we knew it was ridiculous, changing keys all over the place where we weren't supposed to.

The folk-belief among musicians is that marijuana made you think you played better, but that you actually played *worse*. And I think that's how it was. The confusion is due to a second folk-belief among the listeners: they thought that *we* thought that marijuana made us play better, but they were wrong. It did help us enjoy what we were doing, but we didn't think it improved our music at all.

Still, some musicians do find marijuana useful, if not for performing, at least for practice sessions. "It takes away my inhibitions," says a guitarist, "and lets me learn from my mistakes, which is normally not so easy." A mandolin player in a bluegrass group reports:

I might smoke before practicing. I play in a group, and I'll sit down and do a couple of hits to put a little edge on while I'm playing. When I'm stoned, I can visualize musical relationships more easily. The other day, I was practicing scales on the mandolin, double lines of scales in intervals. Playing them high, I made more sense out of them, and finally understood when and how they might be useful in my playing.

A flute and saxophone player finds that marijuana is detrimental when he practices, causing him to forget what key he is in, for example, or presenting difficulties in reading music. But when he plays something familiar, marijuana can sometimes help:

If I'm confident of what I'm playing, pot can magnify the experience: the feel of the horn, the breath, the subtle intonation changes, the vibrations from the lips. The notes slide out like aromatic coffee beans from a sack, until the whole experience is so sharply sensed it's almost unbearable.

This can lead to trouble, too, because if you're not careful, you can get carried so far away by the sound of your own instrument that you stop hearing the others. Or, similarly, you can get so delighted with the patterns your fingers are making that you start watching yourself play instead of actually playing.

Another musician says that he doesn't play when he's high because he loses control of his instrument, even though he finds that smoking can be helpful in encouraging the spontaneity that jazz requires: "The notes go straight from the head to the fingers with no rationalization in between." But a pianist in the same group has a different experience:

When I play stoned, I really think I play better. This is partly because I relax more (that good old tension-relieving aspect of the weed), and partly because I seem to be more aware of the *flow* of the whole thing. I don't just play chords and lines; I seem to feel the whole continuum of whatever it is I'm doing. I know where the music is going, and I'm conscious of the process of getting there.

I also become more aware of muscular movements. It's good to do technical practice while you're stoned, because it really feels like exercise—like calisthenics for the hands. I had my most recent technical breakthrough when I was high. I finally got that little wrist movement that lets the really good keyboard players play so smoothly that you can't even tell when they change hand positions. I haven't gotten it yet with my left hand, though; I ran out of weed!

Notes

1. Pistachio nuts: *A Child's Garden of Grass*, p. 36. [\(back\)](#)
2. "R.": "The Myth of the Munchies and the Dope Smoker's Diet," *High Times*, December 1978, pp. 28-29. [\(back\)](#)
3. "Auditory perception": Weil, "Cannabis," p. 41. [\(back\)](#)
4. Bach harpsichord: Bennett, p. 19. [\(back\)](#)
5. Mezzrow: in *The Drug Experience*, p. 87. [\(back\)](#)

Chapter 4

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

4. Marijuana Activities II

God is looking at the world
through your eyes. Are you
showing Him a good time?

—a smoker in Wisconsin

Smokers have gotten high to sell cars, march at their own graduations, get married, attend funerals, give lectures, appear in plays, be interviewed for jobs, and virtually everything else. Normally, the event in question goes smoothly enough, although there are exceptions, as one young man discovered:

This past year I went for my interview to get into Yale. I stopped to visit a cousin, and we got blown away. I should have known better. I went into the interview with a shoe in my mouth. The man would ask me a question, and I would think about it forever before responding in a completely irrational manner. I'd rather not relive this nightmare.

Because moments like this can and do occur, most smokers have internalized a code governing what activities they will engage in while stoned. For some, tasks that require dealing with systems of authority are ruled out, not because they can't be done well but because they may be highly unpleasant. Even as trivial an exercise as requesting a

telephone number through directory assistance from a strictly impersonal operator can be upsetting to the smoker who is high and feeling friendly and relaxed. Such activities as standing in lines, going to the bank or post office, and sitting in traffic can similarly be unpleasant when one is stoned. (On the other hand, many commuters like to get high during rush hour to make it bearable.)

Sometimes unlikely activities present unlikely problems. A housewife in Dayton, Ohio, writes that she got high with a friend before a neighborhood Tupperware party, where she ended up buying fifty dollars worth of Tupperware "because everything looked so *useful*." Indeed, one piece she bought was more useful than she realized; she now uses it to store and preserve marijuana in her freezer

The range of experiences enhanced by marijuana is endless. A new mother reports that she enjoys breastfeeding when she is stoned:

I felt so aware of the milk flowing and the baby sucking. But the best part is after the feed when the breast starts to fill again. I can practically feel the milk far back, from all parts of the breast streaming toward the nipples, a streaming, yes, that's the best word to describe it.[\[1\]](#)

One of the most unexpected stoned activities is housework. Several users mentioned that they have learned to enjoy this normally dismal task while high, adding that marijuana can also lead to a more thorough job. "I hate housework and usually do the minimal amount," writes a Chicago woman. "But if I get stoned and put on some music, I will tear a room apart and clean every inch of it." And a high school girl adds:

What I think is the most fun to do when you're high and alone is just to clean little unimportant things like the TV screen. These things do get pretty dirty. It's great to walk into the kitchen in a daze, get some paper towels and cleanser, and clean the rubber plant in the hall. You think to yourself, "What am I doing *this* for?"

A man who says he doesn't help out much around the house reports that smoking will put him in a very different frame of mind, in which he feels the need to put things in their proper place. Stoned, he especially enjoys physical tasks like emptying the dishwasher and compulsive activities like chipping away all the ice that has accumulated in the freezer. Other smokers recount similar experiences, and a New York woman notes that it is now as common for professional housecleaners to take five minutes out for a joint as it is for them to help themselves from her liquor cabinet.

Another favorite indoor activity for some smokers consists of handling marijuana, including rolling joints, cleaning an ounce or two, or dividing a pound into one-ounce plastic bags. Good marijuana can be pleasing to look at, handle, and smell, and these pleasures are naturally intensified for the consumer who is stoned.

Several people mentioned that when they are high, they feel more aware of animals, that the animals take on a more distinct identity, that they become easier to comprehend as live creatures with personalities and needs of their own. Among smokers, it is widely believed that household pets become high if smoke is blown toward them. One experienced smoker notes that cats handle being stoned better than do dogs: "Cats either curl up and dream, or else prowl around in a prickly alert state with their fur electrified. Dogs just get splay-legged and drool." Other users enjoy watching animals, especially fish in an aquarium. A Nevada woman elaborates:

I have a desert tortoise as a pet, and the other day I smoked a joint and spent at least an hour just watching him. I became totally captivated with his actions⁷ as slow as they are, and with the various colors and shades of his shell. I can really get into animals when I smoke, and have held "thought conversations" with cats I used to own, to the point where I felt I could really tell what they were thinking. I realize how strange that must sound, but I did feel it.

Once one of my cats had just given birth, and she and the kittens were all together in my bedroom. I just went in, sat on the floor, and watched them for a couple of hours. The kittens were crawling all around me, and I was totally content. It felt like that was all I needed in the world to be happy. Animals also like to get high, and it isn't even necessary to blow smoke in their faces, as most people think. They get high just from being in a smoky room. My cats would get close to me when I was smoking, and would even lift their heads in the air and sniff in order to catch the smoke. Animals get very affectionate when they're high, or else very energetic, and will wear themselves out playing or running around. I'm pretty sure that even my turtle gets high, since he acts differently and moves around more when there's smoke in the air.

Smokers choose different settings for stoned activities. Some, like Judy, prefer staying home, "where I have a wonderful time going nowhere. Before I started smoking there was much more pressure to go out and 'do something,' especially on the weekends." For this group, leaving the house to go somewhere requires too much energy and involves too many hassles.

Another group, given the choice—and good weather—will go out of its way to find a physically pleasant environment, such as a beach, a forest, a park, or a canoe in the middle of a lake. A Missouri man notes that the ideal place to get high is on the levee on the Mississippi, "just laying back with a joint, listening to the sound of the tugboats with the cool breeze kissing you on the face." Another man mentions that, when he is stoned, a simple walk in the woods can turn into an adventure in exploring sensations. "For example," he asks, "how many people have stopped to listen to alder trees rattle against each other on a winter's day when the temperature is down to ten degrees?"

Others use marijuana to enhance short trips and sight-seeing. A college student in Boston recalls one night when he and his roommate, both high, decided to visit Plymouth Rock:

It was intense. We got there, to the pavilion, where the lights give off this eerie, moonish glow. You stand above that rock, and you look out, and there's this rock where the Pilgrims came up—right up to that point. That very rock! And they carved "1620" into that rock. And after all those years, that rock is still there!

In a sense, the more ordinary the experience, the more exciting are its transformations under marijuana. Mark, the computer designer, describes the simple act of taking a walk through his neighborhood to visit a friend:

I love to go walking. If you're stoned enough, you never seem to get where you are going. You lose your sense of time. The usual memory processes aren't working, and it seems you have always been where you are now.

The slightest scene on the street becomes a dramatic episode. Two guys talking to a girl. A man going into a store. A woman carrying a small child out of a car. It all becomes part of this live movie you're watching, looking out at all this simultaneous movement, taking in the panorama of the ever-changing street.

The key to the transformation is that marijuana encourages its users to relax, to take the time really to notice the world around them, to see that which they might routinely ignore on other occasions.

A Long Island woman, now in her early thirties, so much enjoys going for walks with her friends when they are all stoned that she imagines that this will be the perfect activity for her old age. "People associate smoking dope with youth," she says, "but in some cultures it's done more by old people, and I can see why. I once read an interview with Albert Hofmann, who discovered the psychedelic properties of LSD, who said he thought that psychedelic drugs were most appropriate for a 'ripe personality.'"

There is no consensus at all among smokers as to whether marijuana mixes well with work; it seems to depend on the smoker—and on the nature of the work, as a secretary explains:

I can never understand why people will say "I can't smoke now, I'm going to work." Now, I see that this would apply to people who are, say, airline pilots or surgeons, or who do something where you can't take a chance on losing your concentration or drifting off for a few minutes. But for the average person such as myself, whose work doesn't have much to do with

life and death matters, work can be more enjoyable and easier when you are stoned.

I've never screwed up because of being stoned. It just doesn't affect me that way. When I'm stoned at work, I put my attention to the work and everything turns out all right. So I guess what all that says is that I control the dope, rather than vice versa. I have noticed and known a lot of people who are incapable of doing any important work after smoking, but I think they're in the minority.

The majority of users, probably, would not even consider smoking on the job. It's not always a question of being able to perform well; for many, the mix is simply inappropriate. "The whole point of marijuana," says a printer, "is that it can be used as a reward for when the work is over." A young man who works in a car wash finds marijuana helps him cope with the boredom of the job, but adds that he is careful not to smoke before work—or else he might not come in at all. This brings to mind an adage popular among smokers: "Do whatever you want when you're stoned, but decide what you want to do *before* you smoke." For many people, one of the effects of marijuana is that it makes them reluctant to leave the activity in which they are involved in favor of something else.

A Washington journalist has worked out a compromise. He finds that smoking often increases his motivation. If he is working on a good story, he won't need to smoke. But if the deadline is drawing near, and nothing exciting is breaking, he may choose to get high for inspiration. He will also smoke before major events:

Usually I'll smoke up before a presidential press conference, or a similarly important event or speech. Once I ran into Senator Hatfield while I was getting high, and neither of us thought anything too bad was happening, although of course he may not have known what I was up to.

Sports

Only a few years ago, marijuana and sports represented worlds that were not only mutually exclusive but mutually hostile as well. Indeed, the topic of marijuana and sports was initially not considered for inclusion in this book, but the relationship between the two activities was mentioned so frequently that it clearly merits attention.

Our concern here is with amateur rather than professional sports. While a growing number of professional athletes are using marijuana and other recreational drugs,^[2] it is among those who enjoy sports as a hobby that marijuana is especially popular. The college jock who smokes—or even sells—marijuana may be far more common a figure than is generally realized.

In 1978 an informal survey at a prestigious New England college revealed that over half of the players on the school's various athletic teams were regular users of marijuana. "That's much higher than it used to be," comments a senior on the school's highly regarded basketball squad. "Jocks used to be a lot straighter than everybody else, but now that the rest of the world has smoked, the jocks have tried it too."

College athletes who play team sports will sometimes come stoned to practice, but actually to play in a game under the influence of marijuana is considered risky. One football player at the college referred to above says he enjoys getting stoned before the workouts because it makes him feel less pressured by the drills—and the coaches. "I get more psyched and invigorated," he says, sounding a little like a character from "Doonesbury." "It's the next best thing to skipping practice altogether. If they're going to keep you there all afternoon, you want to make the best of it."

The main problem with engaging in athletic events while stoned is not that they can't be done well but that the result is so often unpredictable. A guard on the basketball team explains:

I can't take the chance of playing high anymore. I've done it twice. The first time I played out of my mind, scoring twenty-seven points, a team record. The other time I made a complete fool out of myself, and scored only three points. I don't dare try it again, since there's no telling what will happen.

His teammate says that offense is easier to play stoned than defense is. But basketball requires both sets of skills for each player:

There's just no way I can play defense when I'm high. I can't think straight. I can't play out a strategy or guard my man properly. All I want to do is steal the ball and get a break. But when I do get the ball, I want to do so much and make so many good shots that I try to accomplish everything at once, and generally screw things up.

Coordination is yet another problem. "I get a pass from another player and the ball goes right through my hands." A forward adds that when he plays high, he thinks he's doing well, but the game statistics usually suggest otherwise.

In more casual, less competitive situations, basketball and marijuana appear to go together more easily. A man from the Midwest who plays with his friends describes how it feels when he is stoned:

You run with the ball, bouncing it and dodging about on the floor. But you aren't just running; you're pumping forward and feeling your muscles enlarging and pushing you on, with the sweat pouring out of you. You can feel this because you have never felt it before. When you leap with the ball

to shoot, you've had it all planned and you are moving more slowly. You *know* that you can do it well, shoot more accurately at the basket, as your whole body is warmed up, your blood is shooting through your veins, and you seem to have the game in your body, not just in your mind.

Marijuana is used more often in individual than in team sports and is particularly popular among swimmers, skiers, and runners. Smokers rarely claim that marijuana makes them perform better, recognizing, rather, that it often reduces their athletic skills. But they also find that smoking helps them to enjoy and appreciate the total experience of a sport or other activity. A Minnesota woman observes:

If you're moving when you're high, it's the greatest experience. Take a sport like downhill skiing. God, what a trip. Or canoeing. You feel so many sensations in depth when you're stoned: the wind against your face, the muscles that you use becoming visible in isolation. Marijuana enlivens the sensations around you, and you notice even the tiniest of nature's beauties when you're gliding along in that canoe. Everything appears fascinating, everything envelops you with happiness.

Feelings and sensations resulting from a specific physical activity are likely to become intensified and frequently more personal with marijuana. A teacher from Brooklyn recalls being stoned during one day of a week-long bicycle trip: "I felt as though the bike and I were a unified machine operating under a unified power."

The most popular stoned physical activities appear to be downhill skiing in the winter and going to the beach in the summer. Many smokers say that marijuana makes them feel more energetic. When one man described how he goes surfing high, I brought up the question of danger. He explained that he simply doesn't get stoned on days when the waves are bigger than he can handle. Evidently, he has internalized a sense of proportion with regard to marijuana and the potential dangers of being stoned in the ocean. "You learn to make adjustments," he said, and several other users made a similar point.

Stoned swimming is especially popular, less as a competitive sport than as a pleasant outdoor activity:

I felt as though I were weightless and suspended, especially while I was underwater; that fear caused me to submerge for shorter periods than I normally do. But I also liked that feeling, and the sense that the water had a texture that I could really feel as I moved my arms and legs through it, like soft butter.

A Harvard freshman who likes to smoke on the ski slopes said he was concerned that

the mechanics are often stoned when they mount the bindings for skiers; for this reason, the student was working on a model for standardized bindings. He was fairly certain that marijuana is used more by skiers than by other sports-minded people, and other users agreed with this estimate. The most popular time to toke up, apparently, is on the chairlift. An Oklahoma woman describes this double ascent:

I want to mention the tremendous aid to skiing that grass provides. I am a secure intermediate skier, and I will take the expert trails when I have been on the slopes for a couple of days, and feeling limber again. But it was not until I got high on the chairlift that I actually discovered the necessity of "feeling the mountain" when I ski, and pot helps me in this.

Running is becoming a popular marijuana-related activity.^[3] One of the main effects of smoking on the runner is that it may distort his sense of time. For some, smoking makes the task more difficult, since time begins to drag; for others, however, smoking enables them to transcend their normal concerns about time and to concentrate instead on the running. A Los Angeles accountant described the effect of marijuana on his running routine:

I do five miles three times a week, always stoned. I've been able to run fastest that way. When I'm not stoned, I run slower because I'm nervous. Stoned, I'm more relaxed, and running is all I think about. There I am, listening to my heartbeat, feeling my legs and stomach growing tighter, and I keep pushing. I've timed myself, and grass increased my speed by about 10 percent.

"There are two kinds of high," observes a Texas woman. "There's the feeling you get from going a long distance; that's the true runner's high. The other kind? You run—and then you go and get high." In fact, those who combine marijuana with running are more likely to get stoned *before* starting out.

Some runners, including a Boston attorney, find the "genuine" runner's high so appealing that it becomes an alternative to marijuana. As this man describes it, running was an easier way for him to experience similar sensations to those he used to feel when he smoked:

I love running. It's nice, jogging along, the rhythm of your legs lulling you into a meditation. All your anxieties drop off. You feel like you do when you're high; everything's great, you're relaxed, and you want to embrace the whole world, you're so happy.

And as you continue, you start to get into an altered state of consciousness. Colors may start to blend. Your vision can narrow; things

are not as clear. Sometimes I run right past people I know without really seeing them, and they're always surprised.

The weather makes a big difference. In fog, everything is more intense. On really hot days, you feel the heat intensely; on cold days, sounds are very crisp, and you feel tremendously alive. And the greatest thing about it, after forty minutes or so, are those flashes of problems which come through, solutions to problems you've been trying to solve. It takes time, though, to work up to that much running, where images start to appear from the periphery of your consciousness, and you get childhood memories, and things of that nature.

Unlike other marijuana-related activities, where smokers routinely and with little effort compensate for various losses of ability resulting from the drug, most users who smoke in connection with physical activities must accept the marijuana-induced disadvantages. "When I'm stoned," says a tennis player in New York, "I can't hit the ball for love or money." Nevertheless, she sometimes prefers to play that way. An Arizona player had a different experience:

As I prepared to hit the first ball, my arm felt like lead and my feet like magnets. For both of us, the first few shots were awkward and heavy handed. But then, we played the finest twenty minutes of tennis in our memories: spectacular placements, crisp volleys, incredible shots. I remember one point in particular, a fifteen- or twenty-shot volley at the end of which we just looked at one another, acknowledged that something outrageous was happening, and agreed not to analyze it—but to keep on playing.

My perception of the ball's flight was extraordinary; I saw it coming off Bob's racket like a grapefruit, and moved toward it instinctively. The racket had become an extension of my arm, over which I had total command. I knew upon making contact that the ball would land precisely where I had intended.

After a short while, we came back down from our "tennis high" and dragged ourselves back home. I have never played as well as I did that evening, stoned or straight.

But for most smokers, marijuana means accepting a certain falling off in ability, in exchange for a more relaxed state of mind, which may lead to a greater enjoyment and appreciation of the game. For those who play sports while they are high, winning isn't everything—and it isn't the only thing.

This attitude, which strikes deep at the heart of the modern American sports ethic, carries over into spectator sports as well. For smokers loyal to that ethic, marijuana can

lead to interesting conflicts. A Boston artist finds that he enjoys watching basketball on television, but says that when he is stoned, he isn't as concerned about his beloved Celtics winning or losing as he is in appreciating good play by members of both teams. "When I smoke," he says, "when the game's over, it's over, and I don't care so much who won."

Games

Like sports, games are popular stoned activities. Frisbee is a great favorite, as are such indoor activities as Boggle, Go, chess, pinball, and Monopoly. One smoker recommends magic tricks as the ideal stoned activity, noting that when his friends are stoned, "they get so shocked by these tricks, especially if I just do one or two without announcing that I'm doing magic."

Some California smokers are familiar with a game called "Dealer McDope," in which players are given an allotted sum of money that they then spend on drugs, running the various risks that real dealers encounter. Another popular game, especially in California, is known as "the seventh son of the seventh son." Actually, it is more of a ritual than a game, as marijuana scholar Michael Aldrich explains:

Played most often in communes and frat houses, it requires a constant fresh input from large numbers of smokers, who save every roach from their joints, and put them into a can marked number 1. About seven of these roaches make enough smoke for a new joint; the roach from it is put in can number 2. When there are seven, a joint is made, and its roach is put in can number 3, and so forth. Starting with the second generation the joints will start oozing and getting softer and heavier with THC, almost like smoking a fresh hash joint. By number 3 you will probably have to drill a hole through the center of the joint with a toothpick. By number 4 you may have to keep the paper attached to the third-son roaches intact or the thing will glob up too much. Keeping it in an airtight container like a film can helps this hashishization. The object, of course, is to get to the seventh son of the seventh son, a ticket to a world far beyond "marijuana" as usually smoked. Multiple exponents of seven (one number 2 equals seven number 1s, and so forth) are said to lead geometrically to the Kingdom of Heaven.

In 1974 writer Jon Lipsky wrote an article for *The Real Paper*, a Boston weekly, listing several of his favorite stoned games, three of which are reprinted here:[\[4\]](#)

DICTIONARY AND FICTIONARY

While the verbal facilities are still intact we turn to Dictionary, a game that many fine people are playing these days.

Jayne looks up a word neither she nor anyone else can define. "How about icteric?" says Jayne. No one has the foggiest for icteric. But we all write down on sheets of paper what icteric ought to mean. These made-up meanings are written in dictionary lingo in order to fool people. Jayne writes the real meaning on another sheet of paper, mixes it in with the fakes and reads them all. We have to guess the right one (one point for each person you fool with your fake meaning, one point for guessing the true dictionary meaning yourself):

"Icteric—a prehistoric dinosaur with leathery wings."

"Icteric—a rhythmic beat, a stroke or blow; also sunstroke."

"Icteric—pertaining to, affected with, or service as, a cure for jaundice."

"Icteric, Hans—a 14th Century Danish explorer, discoverer of the Isthmus of Mikwen."

"Icteric—nasty, bilious, filled with bile or fetid materials."

If you want the right answer, look it up. But be careful—the game is infectious and will make your mind define words like "hello" or find derivations for "ostrich feather."

Eventually, however, dictionary lingo becomes uninteresting. To put the creativity back into this type of game we have developed "Fictionary." You play Fictionary the same way, only instead of a dictionary you use any work of fiction.

Nicky grabs *The Idiot* off the shelf. She picks a line from Dostoyevsky's book:

"Nastasya Filippovna had taken a glass of champagne..."

We have to complete the sentence. In the style of Dostoyevsky The real sentence is mixed in with our fakes. Is the correct finish "... and declared that she would drink three that evening"?

Or is the correct finish "... and it was difficult to understand her strange and at times abrupt and sudden sallies, her hysterical and causeless laughter, alternating with silent and even morose depression"?

Or "... and a piece of black bread"?

MENTAL STRIP POKER

There comes a time in every party, though, when someone wants to play a real blood-and-guts competition contest. Playing poker for pennies, however, is absurd, because nothing is at stake. This game puts the stakes back in poker.

Mental strip poker uses regular poker rules for the cards but a different system for betting. The currency in this game is divulgences. Everyone is on his/her honor to divulge whatever is bet during a round. For instance:

I deal. I call for an ante: "One black thought."

Everyone can easily risk divulging one black thought, so everyone puts in the ante.

Jayne has two kings and opens the bidding: "I bid a small sexual fantasy." Everyone stays in. But Mickey, with four hearts, says: I see your small sexual fantasy and raise you a grave doubt." Most of us wouldn't mind telling a harmless sexual fantasy, but a grave doubt—that's too heavy. We fold.

Jayne draws a third king but keeps the bidding light: "I raise you a youthful mortification." Mickey has pulled the flush. "I see your youthful mortification and raise you a major vanity." Jayne wavers, but decides she has put in too much already to chicken out on a possible bluff. She sees the major vanity and loses.

She feels sick. Everyone tells a black thought and a small sexual fantasy, but Jayne has to tell, in addition, a grave doubt, a youthful mortification, and a major vanity. Jayne tries to squirm out of it by using as her grave doubt her inability to grow house plants. We reject this doubt; it is not grave enough.

We remind Jayne of the time one of the women admitted as a major vanity, "I think I'm very beautiful," and as her grave doubt, "I'm afraid I'm not." Now, that was full payment.

ULTIMATE STONED GAME

We say: "Let's play the Ultimate Stoned Game." Everyone agrees.

We sit around the room in no special pattern. We talk, we smoke, we sniff, we eat, we carry on our lives. Eventually someone will notice that someone has left the room. He will say: "Someone has left the room." Then everyone has to determine whether this is true, whether someone has indeed left the room. (If this is true, the person who said that someone had left the room gets a cookie and perhaps a kiss.) If someone has indeed left the room, then everyone has to guess who it is. If you guess the correct person, you lose. If you guess someone who has never been in the house during the evening, you get another turn. If you guess, with a sincerity that no one doubts, that the person who left the room is someone who is still sitting in the room, you win.

Movies and Television

A major effect of marijuana is to intensify the visual perceptions of its users, who report

that they see objects more clearly and colors more vividly. Not surprisingly, going to films is a favorite stoned pastime for many users. Some films, like *2001*, *Star Wars*, *Woodstock* and other rock movies, *Yellow Submarine*, and a handful of others, appeal directly and deliberately to the stoned viewer. But as with music, almost any movie that is stimulating under normal conditions will be perceived as more exciting and more vivid when the viewer is high. A film like *The Harder They Come*, with its vivid colors, pounding rhythms, and frequent mention of marijuana is popular with users in many large cities. It is difficult to generalize, but stoned moviegoers seem to prefer lighter fare, like comedies, adventures, and cartoons. As one smoker puts it, "Movies with complex plots are a waste. You have to keep too much together, use too much memory. Visual trips are much more effective."

Fantasia, that old Disney favorite, has been revived annually in many communities over the past few years, and it depends upon stoned audiences for much of its current—and recurrent—popularity. Its appeal is strongly felt by the smoker with strong memories of the 1960s, since *Fantasia* not only mixes music and color but also portrays an essentially beneficent, cooperative universe, in which various creatures and plants work together in an ordered and harmonious setting of love and contentment. True, there are malevolent characters and frightening situations, but in the film, these are faced and beaten back, and serve to increase the spirit of cooperation among the inhabitants of the *Fantasia* universe.

Yellow Submarine is a more recent and no less successful attempt to illustrate music visually, and it is even more brilliant than its spiritual predecessor. This was the quintessential marijuana movie for the youth culture that made the drug so popular in America and in other countries as well. Sandy, the writer in upstate New York, recalls what it was like to see the film the first time, stoned:

For me, it illustrates the sheer *power* of marijuana, its mind-expanding qualities. On the screen there is an outrageous profusion of color, and while watching it, my visual senses became heightened to the point where my heart was pounding and I actually became overwhelmed with excitement. It was not unlike sexual stimulation, an eyeball orgasm, as it were. Then, to my amazement, my senses would periodically shut down to the point where my poor, overloaded circuits couldn't take it anymore. I sort of blanked out, pretty much unaware of anything at all. Then I would recover, and resume watching the movie. I also remember the communal singing of "All Together Now" at the end. It felt like the characters in the movie and the entire audience were all sharing a joint.

Although they may prefer going to see films, most smokers find television more accessible, requiring far less of an expenditure of energy, no small consideration when high. "You can always find something that goes with being stoned," says a New York editor who enjoys randomly flipping the channels of his television. A teacher in

Philadelphia reports that he likes to make the colors come in "louder" by tuning in the brighter shades of green and red "so that they're flowing at you." He especially enjoys watching political conventions, and during the course of each party's meetings, he will get high "to appreciate the political subtleties of the system," and also *drunk*, "because I want to be on the same level as the people I'm watching."

A number of smokers enjoy watching old television shows such as "The Honeymooners" and "Ernie Kovacs." Other popular choices include live sports events and certain situation comedies. Some people, when high, become involved in programs they would otherwise never dream of watching.

Several smokers mentioned watching the news stoned. For an Illinois man, televised accounts of tragedies led to his giving money and other forms of aid to the victims; this occurred, he says, only when he was high during the news. Karl, a professional photographer, enjoys watching the news stoned because he likes to separate each newscaster from his or her blank facial expression:

Their expressions seem like acting: one night, I finally realized it *was* acting, but acting in reverse. The acting involved in reading the news requires you to *resist* all the emotions which might normally accompany the script. It's a funny notion of acting, I know, but that's really what it is, acting by not acting. You can almost hear the director saying, "Okay, once more, but with less feeling!"

A banker from Birmingham had an entirely different reaction:

Watching the news while you're stoned can be incredibly depressing. You stop and realize that all those terrible things portrayed on the screen, wars and tragedies and all the rest—they're all *true*, and not just television entertainment. Being stoned can put you more directly in touch with what's going on, and sometimes, as with the news, that can be almost too powerful to handle.

Karl's wife Martha, a lawyer, enjoys watching "Perry Mason" when she is high. Normally, she thinks the show is "pretty dumb," but after smoking, she finds that it becomes a mysterious and complex drama. For many smokers, however, the trouble with television is that it just isn't worthy of the stoned experience. "I seem to be more critical when I'm stoned," notes a Colorado housewife. "And when I watch television, I'm aware of the bad acting, the bad scripts, and the bad direction."

There are a few happy exceptions. One is commercials. "I resent the commercials when I'm straight," says a New Jersey viewer. "They're an interruption and a bore." But when he is high, he realizes why for some people commercials represent the best thing about television. "Commercials are made with far more care than most regular programming,

and with far more talent as well." More than regular programs, commercials have apparently been influenced by the drug culture, being more daring in structure and execution as well as in use of colors and images.

Several television shows have flourished in recent years, to the delight of stoned audiences. Perhaps the most popular are the British half-hour comedy show "Monty Python's Flying Circus," and "Saturday Night Live." "We are counting on at least 80 percent of our viewers to be wrecked—really in Cuckooland," "Saturday Night Live" writer Michael O'Donoghue told an interviewer. "So the show is clearly written with that in mind." He adds, although it hardly needs articulation, "It's not like we question a joke because we wrote it when we were stoned." The show is a dramatic illustration of the newfound legitimacy and power of the marijuana culture. That a show appealing especially to stoned viewers could become an enormous hit on network television would have seemed, only a few years earlier, a hippie's crazy dream.

Those viewers for whom television is normally addicting find it even more so when they are stoned. A Washington journalist who occasionally watches television when he is stoned disapproves of his friends who like to get high and then watch whatever happens to be on. "I think that's a disgrace to marijuana," he announces, preferring to smoke only before programs of special interest. "If you get high to watch reruns of 'I Love Lucy,'" he says disdainfully, "then you've wasted your evening. And you get only so many evenings."

Notes

1. New mother: *The Cannabis Experience*, p.101. [\(back\)](#)
2. Their smoking takes place off the playing fields, presumably, although New York Yankee Joe Pepitone revealed in his book *I Remember Mickey* that he once got Mickey Mantle stoned before a game. [\(back\)](#)
3. Running: see Jim Lilliefors, "Dope and the Running High," *High Times*, March 1979, pp. 14-15. [\(back\)](#)
4. Jon Lipsky: "Summer Is Icummen In, Llude Sing Cuckoo," *The Real Paper*, 9 May 1974, pp. 10-12. [\(back\)](#)

Chapter 5

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

5. Sex and Intimacy

Marijuana is one of the smartest plants in the world. It escapes captivity, adapts quickly to its environment, hides from police and has a lot of sex.

—Laurence Cherniak,
The Great Books of Hashish [\[1\]](#)

First things first: strictly speaking, marijuana is not an aphrodisiac. Although the idea is a very old one, there is no chemical evidence that marijuana produces an increase in sexual desire. For most smokers, marijuana can and does increase sexual *pleasure*, and for some users, it leads to an increase in desire, as well.

Still, the popular image persists that cannabis and sex are somehow linked in a cause-and-effect relationship, and the notion that marijuana is a true aphrodisiac is revived periodically. In the nineteenth century, the idea surfaced in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, published in 1845. Dumas describes the effects of hashish on the Baron d'Epinau:

... there followed a dream of passion like that promised by the Prophet to the elect. Lips of stone turned to flame, breasts of ice became like heated lava, so that to Franz, yielding for the first time to the sway of the drug, love was a sorrow and voluptuousness a torture, as burning mouths were pressed to his thirsty lips, and he was held in serpent-like embraces. The more he

strove against this unhallowed passion, the more his senses yielded to the thrall, and at length, weary of the struggle that taxed his very soul, he gave way and sank back, breathless and exhausted beneath the enchantment of his marvelous dream.[2]

The same theme can be traced back centuries earlier, to the *Arabian Nights*, where the reader will learn that hashish has at least two sexual uses. After smoking it, husbands would fall asleep peacefully, unwittingly leaving their wives free to enjoy other lovers. But hashish was also considered an aphrodisiac—which is made clear in the tale of a lover who was about to consummate the sexual act, only to awaken and discover it was all a hashish-induced dream. (And to add insult to injury, the poor fellow found himself surrounded by a laughing crowd, "for his prickle was at a point, and the napkin had slipped from his middle.")[3]

In our own time, the myth of marijuana as an aphrodisiac became prevalent in the 1960s, having enjoyed a brief appearance earlier in the century as part of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics' concerted propaganda campaign against the drug. During the sixties the idea of a connection between cannabis and sex became a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, since the most conspicuous users of marijuana were young men and women enjoying a variety of new freedoms. Marijuana appeared simultaneously with the sexual revolution, and to many it seemed that the two were inherently linked. Indeed, several users surveyed for this book told of their first sexual experience in the context of discussing their initial use of marijuana, and several others spoke of their first marijuana experience as parallel to losing their virginity.

At the same time, the explicit use of marijuana solely or primarily for sexual purposes appears to be far more common among relatively older users, although cocaine has taken over among those who can afford it. Smokers under forty who use marijuana to enhance sexual experience tend to smoke it at other times as well. It should also be noted that smokers who combine marijuana with sexual activity do not generally consider the drug to be a necessary or even frequent part of their sex lives.

In the mid-1970s, the women's magazine *Redbook* published the results of a survey of its mostly middle-class, well-educated readers. Nearly half of the unmarried women who responded said that they had used marijuana in conjunction with sex. A few years earlier, Charles Tart's survey of marijuana users indicated that smokers tend to regard themselves as better lovers when they are high.[4] Among other reasons, they mention more pleasurable orgasms, a closer contact with their partners, and especially a more sensitive and sensual response to touching and being touched. In another survey, Erich Goode found similar results and revealed that smoking marijuana before sex was more popular among women than men—at least in his sample—and that marijuana was found to be useful in breaking down sexual inhibitions. An Atlanta woman confirms this last point:

The most terrific experiences I've had while stoned have been sexual encounters. I finally learned how sensual my body really is, and I can say

without a doubt that marijuana contributed to this discovery. I often get high before making love. My body responds in a more fluid, warm manner, with visual imagery intensified, and every touch sending notes of ecstasy to my brain.

No, I have not become a "loose woman" because I smoke pot. But I'm a lot looser than I was ten years ago. I'm not sure how much of this is due to grass, and how much is because of my personal growth; for me, the two go together and can't always be separated. But I do know that my sexual expression has been greatly enhanced since I started getting high.^[5]

The fact of a connection seems clear enough, but, as usual, the reasons for it are less obvious. One of the most common perceptions of smokers is that marijuana prolongs the sexual act, and it appears that for many men, at least, this is not only a psychological effect—marijuana is known to slow down the awareness of passing time—but a physiological response as well. Another explanation often given is that along with the heightened intensity of sex under marijuana, there is an increase in relaxation, producing the paradox of "relaxed concentration," a combination that has also been noted by people who drive when they are stoned. Mark experiences this paradox in these terms:

People say that grass is an aphrodisiac, but I don't think that's exactly true. It doesn't make you more sexually powerful or anything like that, but it does make everything more vivid and intense. I think a lot of it is that you end up getting utterly lost in what's going on. The rest of the world just stops being there. The thing about concentration is that if the activity generates its own energy, as sex does, you've got it made. Even though you're relaxed, you're not likely to fall asleep in the middle of making love!

Several correspondents mentioned that marijuana helps them to concentrate better during sex. One man suggested that most people who have sexual problems have trouble because "their mind is scattered, and they're thinking about a thousand different things at once. Getting stoned raises your power of concentration." A New York man elaborates:

In making love when you're stoned, you tend to focus on smaller areas of sensation and thus magnify the importance of each one. I've explored a lover, literally square inch by square inch, and have found it unbelievably sensual. Making love while stoned is a new experience each time, with a different quality on each occasion. Also, being stoned facilitates the removal of headtripping during sex, getting you down to pure experience with a minimum of intellectualization .

A Chicago woman in her mid-forties describes a particularly pleasant example of how marijuana helps her to concentrate during sex:

The thirty- to sixty-minute period of lovemaking seems timeless, more like three or four hours. My capacity to focus was greatly heightened. I remember having no body parts except those directly connected to arousal. That is, when kissing, I was aware only of my mouth; when he fondled my breasts, I was only breasts, and later—only genitals. The foci shifted frequently and I was able to concentrate on one sensation at a time, leaving out all others, including hearing, smelling, even touching and tasting in the service of the intensity of being touched.

It should not be surprising, then, that marijuana enhances sexual activity, since it has been known to lower inhibitions, slow down the appearance of passing time, induce relaxation, make people more aware of their senses, and help them to focus on the present moment. As a Chicago lawyer put it, "Sex, ah yes. This is what pot was made for."

Being high allows many users to understand what some sex researchers have been insisting upon for years: that the sexual act should be regarded as something more than a mere stepladder to orgasmic release. Not surprisingly, many smokers report that the prime effect of marijuana on sex is to de-emphasize the orgasm as the central event, allowing them to enjoy more general experiences of physical pleasure and emotional intimacy. This relaxation frequently serves both to delay and to heighten the orgasm, precisely because it has been removed as the focal point of the encounter.

At the same time, the new standards regarding premarital sex during the sixties and seventies have allowed marijuana to fit in very conveniently with the image of socially sanctioned seduction scenes found in the popular men's magazines. "If you went out with a girl who would smoke with you," recalls a man who is now married with children, "you could be pretty sure she'd sleep with you too. In fact, you could pretty much count on it, and if it didn't happen, you could consider yourself taken advantage of."

Predictably, the association between marijuana and seduction has led to concern on the part of some women, who find themselves suspicious of men who show a strong interest in marijuana and other recreational drugs during the early stages of courtship. As one woman put it, "I like to smoke as much as the next person, but many men use dope as one more tool against a girl to get her pants off."

Marijuana is especially useful to people who show a reluctance to let go, since it serves to sanction their right to behave with more abandon. Indeed, both marijuana and sex depend to a large extent on the individual's ability and willingness to enter into a different form of reality without fear. Each person makes certain compromises around the issue of control, letting go to a personally tolerable level of comfort and security. An interesting example is Carol, the psychiatric nurse, who finds that marijuana heightens her sense of abandon—but also increases her insecurities:

Sometimes when I'm very turned on to the person I'm with, I've had the sense of riding a magic carpet. I've told the guy, but he really doesn't understand what it is I'm saying. I really feel like I'm on a plane ride, a very controlled whisking away. It's an abandonment, but one which I feel good about. Actually, it's not so much like a plane ride, because I don't feel anything under me; the visual image is that of a soaring magic carpet. When I'm stoned, I can really get into that. It's happened to me several times. It's strictly a stoned experience. I don't ride on carpets that way unless I'm stoned.

But for Carol, there is another, less pleasant side to having sex while she is high, about which she is articulate and frank. Marijuana may enhance the physical pleasures of sex, but in her case, it also enhances certain emotional realities to the point where there is a stiff price to pay:

Sexually, there's an expansion when I'm stoned, a slowing down, especially of the things I wouldn't want rushed. Just the holding onto someone—that's slowed down for me. I guess I have a real fear of these experiences slipping away from me too quickly. I have a hard time with separations of any sort, even if they're only momentary.

For example, when I'm stoned, and the guy I'm with gets up to go to the bathroom, and I'm sitting on the bed, all of a sudden I'll get the idea and say to myself, "Hey, you've just hallucinated the fact that he's here. But he's not here. He's not in the bathroom. He's gone. This is the reality, aloneness is the reality, being totally alone in the world."

I've had that experience several times. And then I'll hear the toilet flush, and I'll think someone must be here, and then he'll come back in, and I have to ground myself to the idea that he's here, and I'll say, "I'm glad I'm not hallucinating, you're really here, aren't you?" And then he'll look at me—I don't fill in the gaps for him—and I don't tell him I've hallucinated while he was gone.

It's a weird thing, and it happens a lot. If I'm the one who gets up, I'll have the sense that when I return, there will be nobody there.

Sometimes marijuana can depersonalize a sexual experience. This may be what the user wants: for a physical therapist from New Jersey, "There's a special kick in watching yourself, mentally, making love to somebody else." She adds that while grass makes her more interested in sex, it can also make her not want to be touched at all, a paradox mentioned by several other users.

Other smokers find this depersonalizing effect not at all to their liking. A Michigan man who has been smoking for several years says he is now having second thoughts:

I'm no longer sure that sex is enhanced by marijuana. Fucking maybe, but lovemaking is done away with. Stoned tingles are especially intense tingles, and certainly pleasurable, but they just float off into the void while I try to remember who it is I'm tingling with. And where's the drama in that? I have always found sex to extract a psychic commitment, a sense of possibilities and dangers. But with marijuana, it's often roughly equivalent to masturbating with a copy of *Penthouse*.

Lenny has come to a similar conclusion. For him, fascination is increased, but not meaning. "It's very sexy," he says, "but it doesn't really add up to much."

Other users find that while sex and marijuana are usually a good combination, there are definite limits to their alliance. For example, a teenaged girl from St. Louis finds that marijuana stimulates her mind to the point where she can't fully concentrate on the moment at hand:

Kissing isn't that good with a buzz on, because my mouth is too aware. I also don't like it because my mind is always working so I can't concentrate on enjoying it. Did you ever kiss and wonder about life's mysteries at the same time? They just don't go together. When I'm stoned, all I do is think, think, think.

Some smokers experience more serious problems. Sex and marijuana both represent altered states of consciousness. This explains, in part, their special appeal, but it also leads to difficulties, as this Wisconsin man discovered:

Sex provides a peculiar tension that makes being stoned a hundred times better than it is. Notice I said that sex makes dope better, rather than the other way around. Being high does change the complexion of the sex act, though: it can be anything from a five-minute quickie to a long bacchanalian dance, and pot creates a different kind of desire than anything else I know.

But I would not like to be stoned every time I had sex, because eventually the feelings associated with being straight could easily become confused with the feelings of being stoned.

A similar trouble was reported by a woman from Hawaii, who finds that it is not always easy to know where one high ends and the other begins:

While I like to have sex after smoking dope, I sometimes wonder about my

boyfriend. I know I'm high on him, but I'm not always sure whether he is enjoying me or the drug. Do you know that scene in *Annie Hall* where Woody Allen complains to Diane Keaton that she won't have sex without smoking a joint? He gets his way, but then we see an image of her body walking over to a chair to wait for the sex to end. I can't get that scene out of my mind.

A writer in New York complains that marijuana works so well that it could ruin sex by overpowering it:

What disturbs me is that dope threatens to offer a physical pleasure greater than sex. When people masturbate, they usually fantasize another person, so the need for that other person—for love—is still present in the fantasy. But with dope, the fantasy—for me, at least—is usually colors, sounds of music, and various nonpersonal sensations. I feel it displaces the marvelous mammal connection between sex, love, and happiness.

All this is my way of saying that dope messes up my own fucking. I can't connect in orgasm when I'm stoned, either with my wife or with my own body. The foreplay is often better and more interesting, and the first few minutes of intercourse are great, but when it comes to coming with my whole body in a rhythm, dope messes me up. My head bobs all offbeat with my pelvis; my feet don't jive right. It starts well and ends badly.

But for most smokers, sex and marijuana go well together, and many users offered glowing testimonies to the effect of marijuana on their sex lives. For example, a professor from Phoenix writes:

There's nothing more exciting than sex while you're high, assuming you've got a well-developed imagination and a partner to love. When I'm stoned, I just have to look at my wife. Her body becomes irresistible, and mine becomes electric. I undress her slowly, and love her body as though there were nothing else important in my life. My penis is oversensitized, and sometimes is so huge that it hurts. Actual intercourse is such a trip! She always feels hotter and tighter than usual. Frankly, I don't have the words to describe the experience. I only hope I grow old and gray before I lose my desire to love her this way.

For many smokers, marijuana makes more explicit and actually seems to strengthen the link between emotional and sexual love. One man reported that marijuana gave added meaning to the "sweet nothings" that he sometimes exchanges with his wife, like "you

make me complete" or "we're so lucky to have found each other." For David, sex on marijuana is not just physically arousing:

What really moves me are the *emotional* effects of pot on our sex life. It makes me realize whom I'm with, that I have the privilege of being married to and making love to the woman I love most in the world, who makes my life happy and gives it meaning.

Dope helps me to see that some corny expressions carry real meaning when you take them out of their usual packaging. Of course I love her when we're not stoned too, which is most of the time. But smoking often makes that love more concrete, so that it manifests itself with great spontaneity and power.

Mark and Sarah are quite sure that their son was conceived during a stoned session of lovemaking. Mark recalls:

It was a transcendent experience. We knew exactly what we were doing, and were utterly blown away. It wasn't something we had decided to do in advance; all of a sudden, it just happened. That evening, we were both over at Danny's, and Sarah told Danny she was pregnant. We were both sure; there was just no question about it.

Intimacy: Marijuana as Truth Serum

For some couples, the heightening of emotional closeness in sex as a result of smoking is carried over into other aspects of their lives. Murray and Judy, recently married, are both mental-health professionals in their early thirties. They are moderate users, smoking about twice a week, invariably on weekend evenings. Each time they smoke together, whether or not there are other people present, they find themselves experiencing a profound sense of closeness—an intimacy, they say, that led directly to their decision to get married. Since marijuana played a role in that decision, I asked them, separately, to describe how it happened.

Murray began:

When we smoked together, we would really get intimate. It was like our boundaries would fuse. At first it was a little frightening, but we were able to get beyond it.

Judy recalls:

All of these things that go on when we're stoned had never happened to me before I met Murray. I was never as close to anybody as I allowed myself to be with him. We smoked in the beginning of our relationship, but neither of us could tolerate the closeness that soon. And so we didn't allow things to get *really* intimate until after a few months. And then, *vroom*, it began to take over in the way we were with each other even when we weren't stoned.

Murray had told me that he had felt threatened at times during the early months of the relationship. He and Judy would argue frequently, and he would respond by trying to change the subject. But Judy would persist, bringing the disagreement to some kind of resolution. On some occasions, they would be smoking while this was going on, although it didn't seem to interfere with their ability to get to the root of the problem. Knowing that most smokers prefer not to light up a joint during moments of stress, anger or tension, I asked Murray if he had any conflicts over doing so:

Sure, it was hard, but we worked on faith that things would get better. I guess what happens is that by working out one of these arguments, rather than just forgetting it and pushing it aside, as I used to do, you really draw closer to the other person. Of course, we could go through life without ever doing that, but I'm glad we did. I was terrified of the closeness, but now I can enjoy it.

Judy remembers these things a lot more than I do. That's interesting, that she usually remembers them. I think it's more repression than forgetting on my part. She'll remember all kinds of things. We'll have intense conversations, and sometimes they'll become sexual too, and I'll be feeling great, very close to her. The next day I will still feel the closeness, but I'll have forgotten the substance of what we had talked about, and I'll just remember the feeling. I'll ask Judy about it, and almost invariably she'll remember exactly what happened.

For Judy, the process of finding greater intimacy when high together first occurred one summer evening, where for three hours she felt a concentrated closeness that she had never felt before. "I felt totally understood by Murray," she recalls. "I felt like we were on exactly the same wavelength and that I could say anything to him, all the things I was too defended against to say at other times, and that he had not been able to hear." At first, Judy attributed the intensity of these effects to the particular batch of marijuana they had been smoking. She labeled it "truth serum":

I had the feeling on this dope that I was talking right to his core, rather than

the part of him that in his normal waking life is insecure. I was talking to him *directly*. It reminded me of the difference between recording a radio program with your tape recorder using a microphone, or directly, with the cables connected to the source. That's what it was like.

I would say, for example, "You know how ridiculously you were acting today in that store?" And he would say "Yeah," and then I would mimic how he had been acting. But if I had said that while it was actually going on, he wouldn't have heard it at all. That night, I felt that we had no neurotic defenses, and I remember feeling, "This is what it must be like to be successfully and completely psychoanalyzed."

I felt very safe and comfortable that night, but also incredibly anxious, because it was such a concentrated closeness, and it didn't go away, but lasted for three hours. Every once in a while one of us would have to get up and go into another room, just to get a break from all that intensity.

These days, the same thing happens, no matter what dope we smoke. I say, "It's not going to happen this time," and it's like a standing joke. But we have different reactions to it. The first time it happened, when we were dating, he got angry when I brought it up the next day. "You always have to analyze everything, don't you?" he told me. It was clear to me that we had reached a new level in closeness, and I was very upset because he didn't want to talk about it or even acknowledge it.

It may also be because during that first stoned encounter I was able to make interpretations to him about his mother, which I could never say to him in our normal life without getting belted. But stoned, I felt free to say these things, and, equally important, he was able to hear them.

Notes

1. Laurence Cherniak: *The Great Books of Hashish*. [\(back\)](#)
2. Alexandre Dumas: *The Count of Monte Cristo*, chapter 31. [\(back\)](#)
3. "The Arabian Nights story," comments Michael Aldrich, "reminds me that In medieval Persia and throughout the Middle East hashish was often accused of promoting pederasty and homosexuality. The association between marijuana and homosexuality has been an undercurrent of antipot literature for centuries." [\(back\)](#)
4. Tart: *On Being Stoned*, pp. 141-46. [\(back\)](#)
5. Goode: *The Marijuana Smokers*, p. 164. See also Barbara Lewis, *The Sexual Power of*

Marijuana (New York, 1970), especially chapter 3. [\(back\)](#)

Chapter 6

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High Culture:

Marijuana in the Lives of Americans

by William Novak

6. The Social Drug

A friend with weed is a friend indeed.

—a smoker in Wisconsin

I get high with a little help from my friends.

—John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Socializing

One of the most interesting phenomena reported by marijuana smokers is the "contact high." This occurs when a smoker gets high—or higher—merely by being in the presence of other people who are smoking. Some smokers believe this is due to the amount of smoke in the air, which may lead even the nonsmoker to get slightly high. Others are convinced that the contact high has less to do with physical than with social causes. Howard Becker, the sociologist, offers an explanation of how the process might work:

When you're high, there's a characteristic way that you talk, which has to do with not remembering anything that's just happened. Now suppose you're in a group of stoned people, and you're not stoned. They're all talking, and in order to participate, you have to talk that way or else you can't communicate. If you're used to being high, and accustomed to that style of

talking, you can move into it easily, without even noticing what's happening. And if you find yourself talking that way, then in turn you're going to feel high by the association. Unconsciously, you figure that you're talking that way because you're high, so you figure that you must really *be* high.[1]

Smokers have mixed feelings about socializing when they are stoned. Among friends, marijuana loosens inhibitions, allowing people to be freer and more relaxed with each other. Among strangers, many people prefer not to light up, finding that various kinds of polite social chitchat are difficult when they are high. Judy used to be reluctant to get high at cocktail parties but gradually learned to adapt:

I now feel more secure with myself while I'm stoned, and I'm also more comfortable being in the minority, or even being the only one who is stoned. Many of Murray's friends from work like to drink at parties, and I used to feel too inhibited to be the only one smoking, which in turn increased my isolation from everybody else. Now, I toke up before going to these parties, and I can always find a comfortable niche for myself. I don't care as much whether I'm accepted, which, paradoxically, eases my sense of fitting in.

Mark, however, finds that marijuana makes him nervous at parties where most people are drinking. It makes him more sensitive to other people's moods and to their remarks, and he takes offense more easily than usual:

In addition, grass increases my imagination, so that I might read a lot into a few words or a look. Sometimes I'm right, but very often I find myself interpreting something that was not intended at all. I would rather smoke than drink with a group of friends, but in a roomful of strangers, I'd just as soon use alcohol to relax. Grass may have other effects.

To the extent that socializing is built around conversation, smoking may be useful in freeing associations and in helping the user focus in on what somebody else is trying to say. Martha finds that getting high helps at parties whether or not the other people are stoned:

After a joint or two, I find myself paying more attention to what the other person is really saying, rather than hearing only the words he uses in trying to get his point across. By keeping track of his mannerisms and his tone of voice in a more concentrated way than usual, I can more fully understand

his point, and can respond more directly than normal.

A Pittsburgh dentist maintains that marijuana facilitates real conversation when he is with his friends. "I read somewhere that the national average of real conversation, not counting household stuff, the weather, and things like that, is less than half an hour a week. Every time we get stoned, we surpass the national average."

But conversation is not the only measure of group interaction, as this fifty-seven-year-old teacher observes:

I think the greatest moment when a group of people are high is when no one wants to talk, but each person just listens to the music and thinks his own thoughts. No one intrudes, questions or criticizes, and yet the rapport between these people is still there, ready to show itself again at the first spoken word.

But another woman complains that "you can never get a group of stoned people to decide to do anything. It's like everyone is on a different level."

Naturally, whether a stoned person will feel comfortable in a group depends on who is in that group and what he thinks the other people feel toward him. It's a good example of the importance of set and setting, as this Iowa man explains:

If the high people are in the minority, and I'm high, I might get a little paranoid, believing that I probably appear as stoned as I feel, and that this will have an adverse effect on people's impressions of me. Sometimes when this happens I wish my clothes matched the wallpaper so that I could just stand there and never be noticed.

I've learned to be careful about what state of mind I'm in while socializing. Sometimes I get high; at other times I might stay straight, but may bring along a joint just in case. At still other times, I won't even bring anything with me.

For a different kind of person, marijuana can be very helpful in an otherwise awkward social situation. Judy and Murray recently attended the wedding of a friend, which they might have found distasteful and boring:

If we hadn't been stoned, we might easily have gotten caught up in our disdain for the ostentatiousness of the party. Instead, we stopped being so judgmental, and relaxed, and got a huge kick out of it, enjoying the food and the dancing, and even ducking out twice to listen to the World Series on the car radio.

Some smokers find that marijuana can function as a social equalizer. A social worker at a large clinic was disturbed by the extent to which other members of the administrative staff kept their distance from the nurses and the attendants. Believing that this separation was potentially harmful to the well-being of the clinic, she brought an ounce of marijuana to the annual Christmas party and encouraged her friends in both groups to share her supply—together. She thinks the evening had a lasting effect:

There's no doubt that it broke down some of the barriers. Now, there's a little more trust and openness between the two groups. One of the attendants said to me that he never would have expected to see me smoking, and that he realized that I set an example in my work which wasn't necessarily the same as who I was in private. He admired the fact that I smoked and also maintained a high position at work.

Smokers are often pleased to learn that their acquaintances also smoke. "It means that even if they're uptight, there's probably a limit to their pretentiousness," observed a Connecticut real estate broker. "A person who smokes usually has the ability to laugh at himself on some level."

Parties, of course, are the traditional time and place where marijuana is smoked, and among younger users, "to party" means to smoke marijuana. But the marijuana party of the 1960s, where people came together for the explicit purpose of sharing a joint, appears to be on the decline. There are various explanations for this; most smokers attribute it to the growing acceptance of marijuana, which no longer requires special conditions and emotional support from friends. "The thing we stress hardest in our research," observes Norman Zinberg of his work at the Cambridge Hospital, "is that there are socially evolving patterns of drug use." According to Zinberg, marijuana smokers used to gather in small groups because what they were doing was not only illegal but also deviant. These days, it's merely illegal, Zinberg observes. "The pot party and the idea of people smoking together was really an important way of doing it with a minimum of anxiety. It's just no longer necessary."

One user believes that the pot party has become less popular because drinking is a more social activity, whereas marijuana tends to involve its users in subjective, inner experiences. Whatever the explanation, many people now think twice about whether to accept a joint at a party.

They give various reasons. "I don't like to smoke in social situations," says an art dealer, "because I have a hard time keeping up with conversations when I'm stoned, and I don't always like to be asking 'What did you say?' only a few seconds after they've said it." While marijuana may act as a social lubricant in small groups, in larger gatherings it has a tendency to backfire. "If I'm stoned at a party," says a college administrator, "when it's over, I often feel that I haven't made contact with anybody." And an Oregon midwife

speaks for many of her fellow-smokers:

When I do go to parties stoned, I'll often remove myself mentally from the situation, leaving my body out there, and watching myself behave. To some extent I can blot out my own ego, and become a noncritical observer. That's a nice thing to do at a party, get high and watch, but it doesn't do anything for the party.

On the contrary; it goes against the grain of what a party is for. I might sit in a chair by myself and have a great time, and be fascinated, but then somebody will start a conversation when I'd rather be alone, and that would just not be enjoyable.

At the same time, there are many smokers who very much enjoy smoking marijuana at parties. Sometimes the enjoyment begins even before the person has smoked, as Sarah explains:

If I arrive at a party, and I don't know anyone, but I see that people are smoking dope, I automatically feel more comfortable. I can tell that the people will be friendly. There's something primal about passing a joint around that brings people together, even though they may be strangers.

And an Indiana woman observes:

I'm more animated at parties, and I laugh easier when I'm stoned. Once, before going to a party that I knew would be boring, I smoked just before I got there, and ended up talking to the most obnoxious man there. I wasn't even listening to what he was saying. I was just watching his mouth move up and down, which at the time was really fascinating. The only drawback to being stoned is that I lose my train of thought, so sometimes people think I'm a little slow. When everybody else is stoned, it's very funny, but otherwise it can be embarrassing.

Friends

Although today's smokers are more likely to use marijuana when they are alone than was previously the case, friends are still an important part of the smoking experience. Marijuana, as we have seen, often facilitates intimate exchanges, and many, maybe most, smokers prefer to share that kind of experience with people who are important to them.

Claire, the radio announcer, explains:

When I'm stoned with a very good friend, we just sit there and watch messages bounce back and forth between us, like neutrons. It happens rapidly, and we can feel it in an almost physical way.

I often get onto a higher plane of communication with good friends when we smoke together. It almost seems as if we're experiencing mental telepathy, with communication going on so rapidly. And the closer the friend, the more this is likely to occur.

Another advantage of smoking with good friends is that the user is more apt to relax and let go, which makes the high more fulfilling. "When other people think you are very stoned," Claire observes, "and when they are actually happy to see you that way, the whole experience is enhanced."

Although much has been said and written about how marijuana creates a brotherhood of its own, smoking is by now so widespread that the old image of a group of friends sitting around in a tight circle passing a joint is outdated. More often, in a social situation, marijuana is just *there*, although David says he always pays attention to who supplies the goods. "It's like who brings the football when you're kids. The guy who brings the dope—and it's usually a guy—tends to be either somebody that everybody likes or else a complete jerk who is trying to get people to like him."

Some smokers actually have two sets of friends: those with whom they smoke frequently, and others, with whom marijuana is irrelevant. Sometimes, in the case of heavier users, marijuana may define friendship groups, as a Chicago college student explains:

Dope has chosen my friends. Those "high class" people who are straight care more about being popular and rich, and since I would rather smoke pot than be like them, I choose to associate with people who do smoke, or who at least are cool about it. Most of them are fine folks who aren't hung up on pot. When I'm with them, I like myself better, and I feel more sure of who I am, because I don't have to pretend. Most of the guys I go out with are smokers, but if they rely on it too much or are real heads, then I'm not interested.

The distinctions this woman makes better describe a previous era than the contemporary scene, where the gap between smokers and nonsmokers is less pronounced than it once was. But there are still circumstances in which smoking becomes a problem among friends. A New York editor who smokes only rarely does not care to be in a group of smokers, because he finds them "boring and self-indulgent. I just don't like to be in their presence," he says, "even though I may like them individually." The sword cuts both

ways. For example, even though Judy smokes only on weekends, she prefers to spend her social time with fellow-smokers:

We went out to eat a while ago at a very exciting restaurant together with a couple that Murray knows from work. They don't smoke, so we didn't either. The evening was very nice, but I didn't have a good time because nobody was really loose or relaxed, as we are on dope. At this point, I wouldn't consider such an elegant dinner engagement without smoking first. I also think the fact that we haven't pursued a friendship with this couple may be related to the fact that they don't smoke—which to me implies they are probably too inhibited to be really close.

For the woman who lives with her husband on a farm in Maine, there are not many options. Both are in their fifties, and most of their friends in the area do not smoke. "They know that we do," she says, "but we don't believe in doing it in front of them." Most of her friends do enjoy drinking, however, and if she thinks they will be receptive, she may suggest that they try marijuana instead of alcohol. But she is careful not to push the case too hard. Even in the big cities, marijuana crusaders are an unpopular group.

In fact, many of the users who do crusade on behalf of the drug are people over forty-five who smoke marijuana as a conscious substitute for alcohol; their goal is to get some of their friends to do the same. Curiously, there appears to be less advocacy and less proselytizing among younger smokers who assume, correctly, that anybody in their peer group who has had the least interest in trying marijuana has already had ample opportunity to do so.

Carol, the psychiatric nurse, has one friendship whose main topic of discussion has to do with Carol's smoking:

She's always saying that it's rotting my brain and all the rest, or that I shouldn't need it. I say to her, "There's a lot of things in life you don't need, but you want to do them anyway. And why should you not have something you like just because you don't need it?"

Steve, a car salesman, and his wife are daily smokers. He doesn't like to limit his social contacts to other smokers, but he finds it difficult for most of his nonsmoking friends to break through their own conceptions of why he smokes:

It's a real problem, because people know we smoke a lot, and that we're generally high in the evenings. But they have trouble understanding that without laying their own trip on it. For some people, getting high becomes an end in itself, and they don't realize that for us, it's not a goal, but a process. We do pretty much what other people do—go to movies, visit

friends, watch television, talk, and so forth. It's just that we do it stoned. It's a way of doing something.

Claire, on the other hand, began smoking recently enough that she can still remember clearly what it was like to be on the other side. Her opinion of marijuana users was hardly flattering:

Before I started smoking, I used to spend a lot of time with people who were stoned. I remember once being at a party where I overheard a conversation; a group of people were talking and laughing hysterically, and they thought they were being so clever and so funny. They were talking about the world being divided into happiness pits and sadness pits, and things like that.

I didn't want to be disdainful, but I *knew* they were talking nonsense, even though they seemed to think it had real meaning. But now that I also smoke, I realize that they *were* communicating —on that special plane you use when you're stoned: fast, visual, symbolic. Often, though, what you're saying makes little sense to somebody who isn't also stoned, who may well think you're just being silly and pretentious.

A major point of contention between smokers and nonsmokers is the charge that smokers are escaping reality, that they are smoking because they need to. Some smokers respond in kind, with a popular phrase to the effect that reality is for people who can't handle drugs. More seriously, marijuana users insist that "reality" is a subjective and vague term, and that by entering a different form of it, they are not escaping but are in fact encountering it on a different level. As a Boston man explains it, "Smoking is something like a smooth stone skimming across the surface of a lake; you are hovering above your normal reality most of the time, but you never abandon it entirely."

Many nonsmokers feel awkward and even offended by the lack of tolerance shown to them by marijuana users. "Whenever a joint is being passed around," one woman told me, "I always wonder what the other people are thinking of me, since I don't smoke. I feel bad because they probably think that I'm really square, and antisocial."

The irony of her remark is that at the present moment in American culture, there are circumstances in which both users and nonusers correctly perceive themselves as an embattled minority. Nonsmokers sometimes complain of "trips laid on us" by smokers and are frequently offended by the way smokers stick together at a party, forming a closed group of gigglers, acting in an exclusive and detached way. For their part, smokers are often angered by casual pronouncements offered by well-meaning friends about the drug and its use. A retired professor of psychology explains:

What really bugs me are the people who say, "I don't need it." My feeling is,

what an ungrateful wretch, to be put on this planet with this truly beautiful substance, and then to say to the Creator who gave it to you, "I don't need that." These are the people who really *do* need it, and they also need a kick in the pants for being so ungrateful.

More often, though, the differences between the two groups are manifested less in anger than by a simple difficulty in communication. While visiting with Murray's brother and sister-in-law during a vacation, Judy found herself at odds with her hosts over the marijuana issue. "They tried to make us feel guilty about smoking," she says. "But actually, I think they're afraid of trying it. They can't tolerate looking deeply into themselves, and so they write it off, saying, 'I'm the kind of person who gets high on life.'"

"Getting high on life" is by now so well known a catch phrase that many smokers simply smile knowingly when they hear it and make no attempt to respond. The phrase has become for users roughly equivalent to "some of my best friends are Jewish." It's not that smokers don't believe that it's possible to get "high on life"; on the contrary, many smokers hold that getting high on life is the whole purpose of smoking—they regard marijuana as a tool that can eventually be done away with. But smokers are skeptical of people who claim they get "high on life," first because the phrase is glib, and also because it is usually untrue. Smokers find this response particularly annoying, because the nonsmoker who voices it implies that he or she knows what being high is all about, while at the same time confirming that getting high in the first place is a good idea.

While marijuana smoking no longer constitutes an automatic community of adherents, there is still an ethic among smokers that marijuana is to be shared whenever possible. Some smokers, particularly the older ones, are wary about the prospect of legalization, which, they fear, might destroy the last vestiges of community among users, replacing it by rampant commercialization. This sense of community has something to do with marijuana's illegal status, but it goes well beyond that, into the personal realm, as Sarah explains:

The greatest feeling in the world is when you don't have any dope of your own, and you meet somebody and they offer you some. There's something about smoking another person's dope that is highly enjoyable, and usually gets me more stoned than normal. Somehow, if it belongs to somebody else, and they are sharing it, you partake of a different energy, which enhances the experience.

The bond that exists among smokers makes it difficult to conceive of a marijuana tavern, unless someone is perpetually buying a round of joints for the house. Marijuana and capitalism work well together when it comes to advertising and distributing marijuana-related products, such as rolling papers, pipes, and other paraphernalia, but many smokers prefer that marijuana itself be distributed more personally. A nineteen-year-old girl

explains what she likes about the present system:

Most of what I like about pot is that it's a sharing thing. Ninety-nine percent of all the people who smoke will go to a party and share their dope, strangers and all. No one I have ever met would smoke his own stash and not offer it, and that's a nice thing in 1979.

Occasionally, the communal aspect of smoking marijuana will manifest itself more intensely, and for the person encountering it for the first time, the experience can be memorable. A young man from Nevada who spent two weeks at a Methodist youth camp remembers vividly his first contact with other smokers:

The love, the sharing and the camaraderie were overwhelming. Some of these people are still good friends. For me, it was the first taste of that invisible bond which seems to exist between pot smokers, or at least those of the consciousness-raising type, akin to the communion of "water brothers" in Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Marijuana is an incredible social agent, often without anything else that the people have in common. They meet and become friends because they had that one thing in common which led to "do you want to get stoned?" And the answer is usually yes.

Relating to Other People

Smokers often speak of becoming more aware of routine "social games" when they're stoned. They find themselves relating slightly differently to other people, often more directly than usual; this, in turn, makes them more conscious of the barriers that might otherwise be present. In other words, marijuana functions not only as a window but as a mirror as well, and by reducing an interaction to its essence, smoking sometimes separates the basics from the extraneous in human relations.

Smokers in social situations often report gaining a better understanding of other people, and many users recall a lasting impression, insight, or awareness of a friend or relative that first surfaced when they smoked together. Martha once got stoned with her husband Karl's brother, and the occasion gave her an insight into his character that she still finds valuable:

I remember saying to him, "Sam, do you have any sense of what your daughters will be rebelling against in the next few years?" And he replied, "Why do you suppose they will rebel against anything?" And this struck

me, and made me realize that Sam had never rebelled against anything or anybody in his life! The next day, this insight seemed pretty ordinary, but I notice that I have always remembered it, and ever since then I think I have understood Sam a little better.

On another occasion, Martha found herself smoking with Sam's wife Alice, in the presence of Karl:

During the conversation with Alice and Karl, I realized that she was being very self-conscious, and kept stepping back out of herself. I looked at her and thought, "That's a whole new way of looking at Alice." I had never seen her insecurities so palpably before. I mean, it wasn't that I couldn't have verbalized it, but I didn't attach the same weight to it until that evening.

I suddenly understood that her insecurity was a key to her personality, and then I also understood how it was a big key to my own, as well. I understood, too, how she and I clashed because both of us are insecure, and that each of us was always waiting for the other to give the cue of reassurance that actually never came. That's the type of insight I get when I'm stoned, and for me it's very useful.[\[2\]](#)

Marijuana can strengthen existing friendships, and it can also lead to new ones. A Boston photographer recalls that in his high school days, he would often go out for a walk late at night and smoke a joint. After a few nights, he bumped into a fellow he knew from school, a casual acquaintance who was out doing the same thing. The next night, the two of them were walking together and they found a third classmate, walking around by himself, and smoking:

During the day, all three of us hung around with different groups of friends. But for about three weeks straight, we would walk the streets together at night, meeting at a regular time at a certain corner in Brookline. That was nice, and it was very special; we became friendly and comfortable with each other. But we never became friends during the day.

There are smokers who pride themselves on being able to tell at a glance whether a person they don't know is also a user, but this isn't always as easy as it may appear. A college freshman who had smoked extensively for five years was surprised to learn how many people smoked in the restaurant where he worked. It was a franchised steak house, part of a chain, and to his surprise he found that his coworkers were all heavy smokers, and a few were even part-time dealers. He was even more surprised to learn that the manager and assistant manager of the chain were high whenever they visited the

restaurant:

It was all quite a shock to me, finding out how many people actually do get high. I found it intriguing, the kinds of people I met, people I would not think of at all in terms of smoking dope.

For example, there was the director of the restaurant chain. A respectable man, he had a wife, three kids, and was earning forty thousand dollars a year. He lived in the suburbs, drove a big car, the whole bit. He'd come into our place and pull out a beautiful gold cigarette case, packed with twenty or thirty joints. I used to have this idea that smoking was done by the younger generation, so I found it a little strange that guys like this were also doing it.

To get to his job at the restaurant, this student had to travel nine miles in an area with no public transportation. He didn't own a car but soon found that marijuana was good for more than his own private trips:

I quickly learned that dope could be used to barter, and that it could get you anything. I would hitchhike a lot, and I always carried a few joints, and offered them to the people who picked me up.

I was surprised at how many people, even before they commented on the weather, would ask me if I had any dope. I made a lot of friends that way. Soon it would be no problem to get rides, because one of these people would be driving by and would recognize me, and pick me up. And before long, they were driving me to work. It was like having a team of forty chauffeurs.

Footnotes

1. Two variations on the contact high: Some smokers find that if everybody in the group is high, they don't get as high as usual, because the frame of reference is altered accordingly. Similarly, one occasionally hears of a "contact low," which results from smoking in a group where such behavior is not approved of. [\(back\)](#)

2. Martha's experience of "seeing" the other woman's insecurities is similar to Judy's report of "seeing" her husband's defenses. This image of abstract facts and concepts becoming visible is very common among smokers. [\(back\)](#)

Chapter 7

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